

Demolishing Strongholds

Dealing with intractable
problems

Peter Michell

Introduction

Jesus spent a lot of His ministry dealing with the forces of the enemy. As He went about teaching in many places the sick and those troubled by evil spirits were brought to Him - He always healed them all.

Today healing is a big issue and healing meetings draw many. Evil spirits on the other hand are frequently ignored - 'surely in this day and age we are free of superstition so don't believe in such things.' Thus we miss the opportunity to see many freed from their oppressors and we fail to demonstrate God's eternal purpose to the principalities and powers.

The ministry of deliverance is of inestimable value, freeing brothers and sisters from the wiles of the enemy. However, there is the need to handle carefully - that means being led by the Spirit of God at every turn.

Here we are going to deal with specific powers of wickedness called strongholds. Be very sure to read the chapter on the role of the Holy Spirit.

We will also consider how medication, whilst it cannot cure the condition, can be helpful in recovery.

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Chapter 1

What are they, how do they get in

We turn to the writing of Paul and his second letter to the Corinthians to find, in chapter 10 and verse 4, '*ochyroma*' translated 'strongholds.' Here is the context:

'For though we walk in the flesh we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for the pulling down of strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God., bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.' (verses 3 and 4)

When we take a closer look at the original language, which is translated 'mighty in God for pulling down,' we find more expression in the Greek:

Mighty is '*dynatos*' - mighty power. In earthly terms we might think of dynamite in this connection.

Pulling down is '*kathaireses*' demolishing, destroying tearing down, doing away with.

What are they?

Having established that we have the resources to deal with them we will consider what Paul means by stronghold so far as believers are concerned.

Let's take note Paul is writing to believers - we are not exempt from possibility of needing to be freed from a stronghold.

In Ephesians 6 Paul lists our enemies as follows:

'We do not wrestle against flesh and blood but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.' Ephesians 6:12

It is Jude 1:6 which advises us that these forces can leave their own or proper domain and Genesis 6:4 that tells of them invading the human race. Regardless of any academic discussion we remember that Jesus dealt with many of them by driving them out of people. They, most certainly are real and are set against us.

Established - they are spiritual forces of wickedness and as such are part of the wiles of the enemy. Let us also note that in the presence of Jesus and at the word of His command they have to flee.

Evil spirits are numerous and can inhabit a person or affect them from outside their person.

Strongholds are formed when many evil spirits invade and inhabit at the same time rendering the person unable to control them. For example:

'Then they came to other side of the sea, to the country of the Gadarenes. And when He had come out of the boat, immediately there met Him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, who had his dwelling among the tombs: and no one could bind him not even with chains, because he had often been bound with shackles and chains. And the chains had been pulled apart by him, and the shackles broken in pieces: neither could anyone tame him.

And always, night and day, he was in the mountains and in the tombs, crying out and cutting himself with stones.

When he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and worshipped Him.

And he cried out with a loud voice and said, "what have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God that you do not torment me." For He said to him, "come out of the man unclean spirit." Then He asked him, "what is your name?" And he answered saying "my name is legion: for we are many."

Mark 5:1-9

(The account concludes with the legion of demons being sent into herd of swine and the man totally set free from what was clearly a stronghold.)

How do they get in?

Paul's list shows us different levels in the spiritual realm. Jesus confirmed that when He spoke of evil spirits returning, or trying to return, after being thrown out, returning bringing with them even more wicked companions.

Individual demons seem to gain access a number of ways:

- 1 Through the family line - that is passed down through one's predecessors.
- 2 Through unwise actions - i.e. watching horror films, taking drugs, over indulgence in alcohol and food are likely to give entrance to evil spirits.
- 3 Through wrong thinking - allowing thoughts which are contrary to the truth and the nature of the Lord - i.e. contemplating sinful actions.
- 4 Any and all occult activity.

5 Through wrong confession – that is speaking out wrong and negative things about oneself and family. i.e. I expect I will get sick, or I expect to lose etc.

6 Through wrong doctrine – that is believing something wrong. i.e. believing that the Lord is just waiting to pounce the moment you put a foot wrong will develop a wrong understanding of the Lord and can lead to fear.

7 Unforgiveness. We are specifically warned that being unforgiving leads to a bitter root developing, causing great damage.

8 Through accidents. (especially a spirit of fear)

My list may not be exhaustive. These are risk factors which can open the door to evil spirits, not automatic entry points. The more one indulges in any of the above the wider the door opens.

The scripture does not give us an exact description of how a stronghold develops, just confirms their existence. A stronghold may develop when one continues and continues in any wrong actions or any line of wrong thinking. Like all the works of the enemy a stronghold is based on lies.

It seems that to become a stronghold, a fortress, there could be a number of lies, rather like a web, combining together. The clue is in the passage:

'For though we walk in the flesh we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for the pulling down of strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God., bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.'

Here, after strongholds, we find arguments and every high thing, or pretension that is contrary to obedience to Christ. So we are dealing with lies, things contrary to Jesus who is Himself, the truth.

The stronghold primarily forms in the mind, in the thinking, making it very difficult, and at times impossible for the sufferer to think clearly and straight and to receive anything in the way of spiritual truth. In the example of legion we are not told how the evil spirits gained entry, just that they had virtually taken over the man.

James gives another clue. *'Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin: and sin when it is full grown, brings forth death.'* 1:14-15

Jesus gives the warning, *'When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. The he says, " I will return to my house from which I came." And when he comes he finds it empty, swept and put I order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first.'*

Matthew 12:43-45

Pre-emptive avoidance of such problems

Because strongholds are established and thrive on lies the building up of a good and thorough understanding of the truth will provide protection therefrom. In this context we remember that Jesus is Himself the Truth and that He sent the Holy Spirit to lead us into all truth. Therefore praying and asking the Holy Spirit to fulfil Jesus promise by leading us into all truth is a very good discipline. He will do this as we study and ask Him to give us understanding.

Chapter 2

Discernment and symptoms

'Solid food belongs to those who are of full age (mature), those who by reason of use have their senses (literally, their faculty of perception) exercised to discern both good and evil.'

Hebrews 5:14

Maybe it is not quite clear what is meant here. Do we mean spiritual senses or the natural senses of sight, smell, taste and of hearing.

Most definitely, the bible describes the discernment of spirits as one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:10)

Also the scripture talks of believers being the aroma life to those who are being saved and the smell of death to those who are perishing. (2 Corinthians 2:15-16)

As one who has had some experience I can say that the discernment that comes from the Spirit is essential so far as I am concerned. It comes in different ways - maybe a specific word, or a picture or a bible reference dropped into the mind.

Then by observation I have seen that in dealing with spirits there are frequently various manifestations, including uncontrolled actions, bad smells, outbursts, confusion. Among others I have also noticed that sometimes one can be aware of something looking out through the eyes.

Always seeking clarity and confirmation from the Lord is essential.

Strongholds

The symptoms of the presence of a stronghold

Paul emphasises the realm of the mind when talking of strongholds. The effect of a stronghold seems to have the following symptoms - not being able to think clearly, being confused, being unable to control one's thoughts, inability to stop thinking about certain things, denial of scripture and the truth, denial of obvious facts, and so on. Strongholds can lead to suicidal thoughts.

Certain physical and mental conditions can be the result of a stronghold in the mind such as:

Anxiety, eating disorders, lack of control of impulses, personality disorders, uncontrollable mood swings, psychotic disorders and so on. This is not to say that a stronghold is always the root of such things - there may be other causes, rather it is to say that a stronghold can result in these manifestations.

(Anorexia is a good example. The sufferer won't eat or eats very little thinking they are too fat. Even when faced by a very, very thin reflection in the mirror the fact is ignored and the mindset continues to dominate their behaviour.)

Chapter 3

Demolishing strongholds

To the Apostle Paul God gave understanding of the New Covenant. It is a grave mistake to rationalise away the teaching in his letters because all scripture is God-breathed. The Apostle Peter acknowledged Paul's letters as scripture (2 Peter 3:14-16).

A cardinal 'rule' for Christian life is to submit oneself to the New Covenant rather than setting oneself above the scripture, acting as judge over it - for in doing that one is saying 'what I think or judge to be correct is greater, is more important than the God-breathed scripture - clearly a lie!' This is not obedience to Christ, but is disobedience and is dangerous to holy and Christian living.

Paul's teaching regarding how to deal with a stronghold - i.e. the God-breathed solution:

'For though we walk in the flesh we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for the pulling down of strongholds:'

- 1 ***The weapons of our warfare*** - Yes we dwell on earth in the flesh, but this issue is in the spiritual realm where we battle with the enemy.
- 2 ***are not carnal*** - that is cannot be dealt with using fleshly methods. Medicine has only 'fleshly' methods such as drugs and therapies. They may bring temporary relief, but that is all.

- 3 ***but mighty in God.*** 'Mighty' is from '*dynatos*' which we can say is mighty like the power of dynamite. 'In God' shows us that the mighty power is in the realm of God - we see that manifest in Jesus and in the Holy Spirit.

- 4 ***for pulling down of strongholds.*** Pulling down is translated from '*kathairesis*' which more fully means to demolish, overthrow, take down, destroy.

Paul is telling us that in God we have the mighty power sufficient, more than sufficient, to deal with spiritual strongholds. After all a stronghold is just built on a web of lies!

Using the mighty power of God

We can see two elements 'in God' which are mighty - that is of immense strength.

- a) *'For the word (logos) of God is living and powerful and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.'*
Hebrews 4:12 This is why developing a good sound understanding of the truth is very valuable.

- b) *'Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit which is the word (rhema) of God.'* Ephesians 6:17

Jesus is described as the word (logos) made flesh. (John 1:14) He is also described having all the fullness of the Godhead in bodily form. (Colossians 2:9)

So we can rightly interpret the 'logos' as being the full explanation of Jesus saying, *'I am the way, the truth and the life.'* John 14:6. The scripture, the written word, is a major part of the 'logos,' and as such is the recorded part of the truth.

As strongholds are made up of lies, the truth, and therefore the scripture as the truth, is a major weapon and the antidote to all lies.

Then we have the aspect of listening to what the Lord has to say to us. That will never, never, contradict what is written in scripture as the New Covenant - the Lord God is the same yesterday, today and forever and is not the author of confusion. When He speaks to us a truth in word or picture this is the 'rhema' word of God.

Jesus said this is invaluable for life, *'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word (rhema) that proceeds (is proceeding) from the mouth of God.'* Matthew 4:4

When dealing with strongholds these two parts of our armoury are of great importance. In use they are mighty and are used to demolish strongholds and to demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself against obedience to Christ - that is against truth.

As with all things in the Kingdom of God these are spiritual and not carnal or fleshly and as we go by the Spirit we will be led in their use accordingly.

Jesus cast out evil spirits by word of command. He told them to leave, and, of course, they obeyed.

For us the principle is the same. The evil spirits will leave and strongholds demolished by speaking out the command. This is not by our own power - it is not carnal. Rather it is applying the word of God, in the Spirit and as led by the Holy Spirit.

'Resist the devil and he will flee from you.' James 4:7

Be humble, be reliant on the Holy Spirit. Dealing with evil spirits and strongholds and arguments and every high thing which exalts itself against the knowledge of God is empowered by the grace of God towards us. Empowered by the grace of God is something we need to understand. We do not earn God's grace in any way - it is a free and undeserved gift. Our very salvation is such a gift, *'by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.'* Ephesians 2:8

The same principle applies in dealing with evil spirits and strongholds - all the power belongs to and comes from the Lord and is freely available to us by grace.

Chapter 4

Wounded soldiers – recovery

Whether we like it or not there is a spiritual war going on around us. We will be effected by it even though many times we will think the things that befall us are just natural. Peter advises us to wake up and see the reality, *'Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.'* 1 Peter 5:6-9

And, 'Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.' James 4:7

Much of our difficulty and loss is down to the wiles of the devil – even seemingly natural causes may be his doing, often through others or what appear to be circumstances. Paul explained this to the Ephesians in Chapter 6, verses 10 – 18.

Just as we find in physical life there are injuries, particularly, but not exclusively, in war or battle, so in life we can suffer injuries coming from a spiritual source. Christians who indulge in sinful activity may find themselves host to an unwanted presence – an evil spirit or demon. Wrong doctrine can allow the entrance of deception, sinful actions, and evil spirits. Life is then damaged thereby.

It is very easy to miss the mark – in fact the bible makes it clear that everyone does - we all sin.

(The antidote is provided in 1 John 1:9 – *‘If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.’* Keep short accounts!)

Enter the danger zone.....

The believing and accepting of lies – commonly we see people thinking, I am no good, I am too fat, God can’t love me, the bible isn’t really true, and so on. Continue along this line, believe lies and you become fertile ground, attractive to evil spirits and deliverance therefrom can become necessary.

Build lie upon lie and you have the basis for the development of a stronghold. Accepting and repeating a lie about oneself, or one’s position before the Lord is dangerous and is likely to lead to consequences which in their worst form create a stronghold.

Strongholds are thought patterns in the mind which become overwhelming. Strongholds are part of the host of spiritual powers from Ephesian 6 verse 12. They are powerful and very damaging.

It should be noted that in a passage in Matthew (12:22-30 and 43-45) Jesus was teaching about dealing with demons, evil spirits. He talked of dealing with the strong man so that you can rob his house. A stronghold can be likened to be a strong man over a house in this context, and other evil spirits are likely to be present in the house.

Recovery is needed

Once dealt with, strongholds demolished and evil spirits cast out, the sufferer is likely to be left weakened and or wounded. This can be both physically and spiritually. (This is not to deny that the Lord can by miracle give immediate full recovery. Praise the Lord when He does, but that is not everyone's experience.)

The recovery process may take time. Consider the parable of the good Samaritan. The man, attacked by robbers on his journey, was left half dead. He needed to recover. Along comes potential help in the form of a priest – a very religious man, surely he will help. But No, he passes by. Another potential source of help comes in the form of another deeply religious man, a Levite. Does he help? Again No.

Finally, along comes a Samaritan. He sees the half dead man, he bandages his wounds pouring on oil and wine, sets him on his own animal, takes him to a nearby inn, pays for his immediate upkeep and pays for his future care.

'Religion and the religious' could not help – actually showing that the Law was and is powerless to help. What is needed is grace and mercy and practical help ministered with love and prayer.

Recovery can be quick or can be slow - it may depend on how badly wounded is the victim of the attack. On the path of recovery there are some things to learn:

The Samaritan poured on oil and wine and we could see these as vital ingredients to recovery. We could interpret oil and wine as representing grace and mercy. We are invited to the throne of grace to seek mercy and grace in times of need. (Hebrews 4:16) God's abundant supply of grace and mercy is both available and needed.

Hope is vital, even if the hope is (temporarily) not being placed in things spiritual. The wounded one must have some hope for, '*without hope the heart is sick.*' Proverbs 13:12

[The body's production of adrenalin can be counter productive even reproducing symptoms the same or similar to those produced by the stronghold - that can be very confusing to the one ministering. (Adrenalin is formed in the body when there is a threat. It's effect is known as the power to 'fight or flee, or faint.' To a wounded one it can take only a little worry or anxiety to set off this adrenalin reaction causing set backs in the pace of recovery.)]

The use of medication during recovery

It would be a mistake to think that medication cannot help during recovery. After a stronghold is broken there remains a weakness in mental facility such that small things can trigger adrenalin responses. Irrational fears or anxiety can cause the body to produce adrenalin, as can fitful sleep. One family doctor describes an irrational fear or anxiety as being seen by the brain as a 'tiger.' It is not real - nevertheless because the brain sees it as a danger, 'tiger' it produces adrenalin. When adrenalin is produced the fear and anxiety are much increased causing set backs.

The prescription of small doses of various drugs can be used to prevent or minimise the 'tiger' reaction. Thus helping the recovery process. As already stated medication will not cure the underlying problem which is actually the mind accepting lies thrown at it causing an adrenalin response. In the next chapter we see that truth is the answer to lies, and that there is a rebuilding process which takes time.

Always be led by the Holy Spirit in the use of medication rather than assuming it to be the right thing to do.

Full recovery may take time and patience will be required.

Jesus gave a warning in the second verses referred to above. (12:43-45) He referred to the house being swept clean when the evil forces are removed. Then warned they are likely, at some time - maybe years later, to seek to return. If the house is empty they go in again taking with them others more wicked than themselves. Now the position of the sufferer is worse than before.

So we see that in order to prevent this happening after full recovery *rebuilding to 'fill the house' is essential.*

Chapter 5

Rebuilding

Strongholds are built on lies as we see in the text:

'For though we walk in the flesh we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for the pulling down of strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God., bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.'

Strongholds are put together with arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God. Lies upon lies build strongholds. Strongholds are built in the mind and when removed are likely to leave the sufferer weakened in his or her mental ability and/or in his or her beliefs.

For example. Anxiety tells you to be afraid of what is coming. The scripture tells us to be anxious for nothing and to cast our cares on Jesus – because anxiety/fear is just a lie. The truth is there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God and He promises to bring good out of every situation. God has provided the throne of grace for us when we have needs and concerns – come to find grace and mercy at these times of need.

The antidote to lies is the truth. Rebuilding spiritual strength will need the input of truth. Praying for more and more understanding of the truth and more and more love for the truth will enhance the process of growing in the truth.

The essential ingredients of truth will be **hope** - that is the certainty of future blessing, **trust** - that is choosing to place one's trust in the word rather than the circumstances and **rest** - that is understanding that we are upheld by the grace and mercy of God rather than relying on our own efforts.

The continual input of truth, day by day, will be needed for the rebuilding. The Holy Spirit is given to us for the purpose of leading us into all truth - so calling on Him to help is very appropriate.

There are many resources available to us. The bible itself is our principle and best source of truth, then there are commentaries, teaching studies, and so on. We always pray to be led into truth so we can discern the good from the not so good, so we can align our understanding with the scripture. Even the best bible teachers don't get everything right!

There are many scriptures that will minister strength and good things. One may consider that the one affected by the stronghold could bit by bit consider and find scriptures for:

- a) What the Lord has done for me.
- b) Who I am in Christ Jesus
- c) His promises for working out life and godliness
- d) My inheritance in and through Him.

'you shall know the truth and the truth will set you free.' John 8:32 Spoken by Jesus when advising the disciples to abide in His word.

Chapter 6

The role of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus promised us the Holy Spirit to be with us and in us. John 14:17 *'He dwells with you and will be in you.'* We cannot achieve anything of spiritual value on our own – even our good works done in the flesh are just filthy rags before the Lord. Isaiah 64:6.

Always we are urged to walk in the Spirit – even more so when dealing with our adversary and during the period of recovery and rebuilding. Seeking the Spirit for more love for Jesus and more and more truth and understanding will enhance both recovery and rebuilding – and anyway are good for all of life.

Particularly during recovery and rebuilding are times of weakness and added sensitivity for the sufferer (hopefully gradually reducing). It is very easy for things to trigger a setback. To some extent setbacks are to be expected, *'two steps forward, one back.'* But wherever possible they are to be avoided. Relying on the Holy Spirit to be our guide and not doing anything without His leading will certainly reduce, if not, eliminate, setbacks.

'Do not be drunk with wine in which is dissipation; but be (continually – present continuous tense) filled with the Spirit.' Ephesians 5:18 Go on and go on being filled with the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is the spirit of truth, and Jesus tells us He is the truth, as well as the way and the life. Our adversary's weapons are lies. The antidote to lies is to be built up in the truth as we consider in the next chapter.

As we are continually filled with the Spirit we will experience the fulfilment of Jesus promise – the Spirit will be with us and we will know He is in us, leading us as we listen to Him.

'you shall know the truth and the truth will set you free.' John 8:32 Spoken by Jesus when advising the disciples to abide in His word.

Chapter 7

The importance of the mind

The scripture gives clear teaching about the importance of the mind, urging us to keep it renewed by thinking only of good, noble and pure things.

But then along come all sorts of thoughts to drag us down. These emanate from the world around us, from the adversary and from our own flesh. There is no way of stopping them coming so it is a question of what we do with them

We have authority over our own minds. We don't have to allow any thought to take up a position in our minds. We can choose. Almost subconsciously we can monitor each thought against the truth, dismissing those which are contrary to the truth. And when a thought is becoming established we can consciously dismiss it.

For this purpose the greater is our understanding of the truth the more we become able to recognise and dismiss lies. One of the reasons why this is important is down to the bodies production of adrenalin. Lies will destabilise and frighten causing the body to produce adrenalin, which in very counterproductive in these circumstances.

Personal bible study and good bible teaching are invaluable. The Holy Spirit will assist us in both understanding and in recognition if anything being taught is inaccurate or out of place.

As it is the role of the Holy Spirit to lead us into all truth my favourite prayer (number 2) is, 'Holy Spirit please lead me into all truth, more and more.' He, of course, is very happy to oblige. It is a life time's walk with Him into more and more understanding.

In warfare Paul tells us to put on the whole armour of God and lists the belt of truth as first and foremost.

In the Old Testament there is a verse which tells us that, '*as a man thinks so he is.*' (Proverbs 23:7) When we believe any lies they manifest themselves in our experience.

Frequently our adversary will come with lies - right in the beginning he beguiled Eve. Our enemy will often throw doubt on eternal truths - such as, You are not worthy, you are not good enough, you don't think God loves you do you, God won't answer your prayers, and so on.

When we accept any lies they set to work in our beings bringing anxiety, fear, depression and so on. The antidote is always the truth. A way of breaking the cycle and work of lies is to 'deliberately' praise and worship - for lifting up Jesus in this way is an expression of the ultimate truth.

(The garment of praise is given as the antidote to the spirit of heaviness. Isaiah 61:3)

The scripture is given to us as the truth and is good for doctrine (what we believe), reproof (to check what we believe against), for correction (to put us right), for instruction in righteousness (being in right standing with the Lord.) 2 Timothy 3:16-17

It makes us complete and fit for every good work.

The adversary does all to deny the truth. He whispers that the bible cannot be trusted, that it is incorrect, that it won't help, that it is irrelevant. It is all lies to keep us away from the one thing that really is important.

The truth is the truth, is The Truth, is THE TRUTH

'Every word of God is pure. He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him'. Proverbs 30:5

'He who despises the word will be destroyed, but he who fears the commandment will be rewarded.' Proverbs 13:13

'So shall My word that goes forth from My mouth: It shall not return to Me void.' But it shall accomplish what I please and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it . For you shall go out with joy, and be led out with peace.' Isaiah 55:11-12

'The word of our God stands for ever.' Isaiah 40:8

Chapter 8

The difficult verse in James and its resolution in Peter.

'My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect, lacking nothing.' James 1:2-3

James' advice seems impossible – and in our own strength it is! Nevertheless when we remember the eternal truth that *'all things work together for good to those who love God,'* then we can know hope. (Romans 8:28)

In the account of the great storm found in Mark 4:35-41 we find some helpful thoughts:

Jesus told the disciples that they were going to cross over the other side.

A great storm arose.

Jesus was in perfect peace asleep in the stern.

The professional fishermen, the disciples, became frightened – they thought they were perishing and Jesus didn't care.

The disciples wake Jesus who calms the storm. (Fulfilling Psalm 65:7)

Jesus questions the disciples, 'why are you so fearful?'

From this account we can extract some truths:

Jesus knows what is going on. He knew the storm would arise before they set off?

Likewise Jesus knows about all the trials we go through in life.

Jesus was in the boat with the disciples. Likewise Jesus is in us throughout all that we go through in life and with us in and by the Holy Spirit.

Why then do these things happen?

We need to understand that it is God's eternal purpose that we, the church, demonstrate to the principalities and powers His manifold wisdom – Christ in you the hope of glory. If life was always plain sailing nothing would be demonstrated.

So when the adversary challenges us with adverse circumstances (trials do not come the Lord God for He does not tempt or try anyone James 1:13) then our reaction to the trials we face will demonstrate the wisdom and power of God. So James says, 'count it all joy' – because there will be fruit.

Peter says, 'Beloved do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you: but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.' 1 Peter 4:12-13

Just as Jesus was tested with lies from the devil when in the wilderness, so we too are tested or tried by lies from the devil, our adversary.

But there is more to say.....

Paul tells us that the Lord will not allow us to be tested or tempted (same word in Greek) beyond what we can bear without providing a way of escape. 1 Corinthians 10:13

Peter advises:

'Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. Be sober, be vigilant: because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.

But may the God of all grace who called us to His eternal glory in Christ Jesus, after you have suffered little while, perfect, establish, strengthen and settle you. To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever.' 1 Peter 5:6-11

This is part of God's manifold wisdom, that those who are His resist the devil and all he can throw at us and continue to stand. God, that is He Himself, after a little while moves in to perfect, establish, strengthen and settle us to His glory.

Even in the most difficult circumstances He prepares the way of escape. This He does in fulfilment of Isaiah 59:19 *'When the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit raises up a standard against him.'*

The Hebrew word translated 'standard' comes from 'nus' which means to put to flight. This is the flag of victory!

James also talks of double mindedness telling us that a double minded person should not suppose that he/she will receive anything from the Lord. Here is a difficulty for those who have suffered from a lying spirit or from a stronghold. The enemy does not give up easily and whilst the spirit may have been removed and the stronghold demolished there will still be attacks.

Whilst such a sufferer is recovering there will still be some susceptibility to lies from the enemy. After all the enemy does not announce this is a lie, please believe it.' Furthermore he is likely to speak in moments of weakness and or to feelings.

However the resulting double mindedness will be diminished as more and more truth is taken in. As an analogy think of a hot air balloon. The helium lifts the balloon whilst the ballast in the basket holds it down. The pilot seeks to balance the forces to get lift and enjoy the ride. Now think of the helium as the truth and the ballast as being like lies. All input of truth helps lift us up towards heavenly places, whilst taking on a lie or lies will drag us down.

There the analogy lets us down because we are aiming for complete freedom – the 'balloon' would have gone entirely out of sight.

However the truth is there – it is necessary to move on from double mindedness bit by bit to complete belief in and reliance on the truth.

'Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.'
John 8:36

Discern, Demolish, Patient recovery, Rebuild truth and faith.

Receive the promise of Jesus, 'I have come that they might have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.' John 10:10

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