

Situational Awareness

In 2006, at the Kajaki dam in Afghanistan, a three-man patrol spotted an illegal Taliban roadblock. As the team covertly approached the roadblock crossing a dry riverbed, Corporal Stuart Hale unknowingly triggered a landmine and lost a leg in the explosion. The squad radioed base for assistance, but command feared to send a helicopter that would have to set two wheels down. The squad was told the chopper would have to land in a safer area nearby.

Sergeant Stuart Pearson went and successfully cleared an area for the approaching Chinook helicopter to land. However, on his way back to rejoin the platoon he triggered another landmine, causing further casualties.

When the helicopter finally arrived, none of the men were willing to approach, seeing what had just happened to Sergeant Pearson.

The soldiers of the British 3rd Battalion Parachute Regiment now, for the first time, understood that they were all standing in the middle of a minefield.

The military calls this "Situational Awareness."

In today's passage, we're shown an equally dramatic demonstration delivered upon the Seven Sons of Sceva by a demonic spirit. With step after step, the Seven Sons wander deeper into dangerous territory until they are at last met by a true foe - an enemy who most certainly knows his terrain.

This passage is here to show us, in these days, four truths - four points of Situational Awareness - which we need to set firmly in mind before we ourselves step out onto the field of spiritual warfare. They're on your bulletin on the right side, read along with me and we'll see how the Scriptures show us:

Firstly, verse 14 reveals that: **Neither parentage, profession, position nor proclamation bestow any standing in Christ**

Second, verses 15 and 16 reveal that: **Your enemy knows and will expose your weak points of unbelief**

Third, we see in verse 16 how: **False professions are dealt with publicly**

Ending with our final point from verses 18 to 20, that : **The display of the truth brings repentance and salvation**

Let's begin our morning's "combat briefing" and take hold of our first point from verses 13 and 14, that -

1) Neither parentage, profession, position nor proclamation bestow any standing in Christ

Here in Ephesus we find a thriving business underway. We read of a number of "itinerant" Jewish exorcists, the most prominent ones being singled out as

"...the Seven Sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest."

This pair of verses reveals some things that just aren't right. Notice first that we have "itinerant Jewish exorcists."

Exorcisms were a common practice in the first century. Jews in particular had ornate ceremonies based on apocryphal books such as Tobit, using incantations and items harking back to King Solomon. The famous first century Jewish historian Josephus speaks of witnessing such an exorcism in his *Antiquities* (8:45-49.) Most exorcisms in Jewish life were performed either at the synagogue or at a home attended by a quorum of ten pious men from the congregation, called a *minyan*.

Yet that's not what we see here in Ephesus. Instead we have these solo artists, we have the first-century equivalent of carnival tent faith healers, proclaiming that they are able to do what the Officials could not. They have another Way. They:

"...took it upon themselves..." (Acts 19:13)

What of the Seven Sons of Sceva? The passage tells us that their father was a chief of the priests in Ephesus. A family business! But we have to ask ourselves, why weren't these boys at the Temple? The position of the sons of priests was to be priests themselves, according to Exodus 28:43. And don't miss that number seven, which represents the idea of completeness and holds all sorts of grand significance in Jewish mysticism.

Another interesting note is that the name "Sceva" means "mind-reader," so it's quite possible that Sceva had risen to his position not because of piety but rather because he embraced the mystic-crazy culture so loved in Ephesus; and his sons are simply following in their father's footsteps.

Think for a moment of the reputation and prestige this gave these men! Even today we discuss news articles about the children of notable Godly men of the past. Our natural human inclination is to think these are chips off the old block, that we can expect that same effectiveness or insight or spirit from them as we've seen in their parents. Sometimes God may choose to bless such children with ministerial gifts, other times He may not. As Pastor Pat has remarked, "God has many children, but has no grandchildren" - but we still tend to expect godliness from the children of famous religious figures, don't we?

So it would have been in Ephesus with the magical mystical Seven Sons of Sceva. What grand showmen they are! And not fools either. Having heard of Paul casting out demons and healing the sick, they want to get in on the act. So they:

"call the name of the Lord Jesus," (Acts 19:13)

- we'll talk more about the Name a little further on -

... and then notice what they say:

"We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches."

Their own words confess how they have no personal experience with Jesus! Not even a passing mention of the gospel has entered the minds of the Seven Sons. They only seek to use His name to entice the weak-minded and vulnerable in order to gain prestige and profit.

Is that sort of behavior a fruit of a disciple of Christ?

This shows us our first point of application, so make a note of it in your “war journals” :

The highest position a person should desire to achieve is to become a Christian

Christ Himself says of us in John 15:5:

“I am the vine, you are the branches.

He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit;

for without Me you can do nothing.”

Why were these exorcists making all this noise? All the big show? Puffing up their family histories, proclaiming loudly of what they did and in whose name?

Because they simply didn't believe. They didn't seek Christ. They sought riches, they sought honor, they sought glory, they sought position. But they hadn't, in the first place, sought to know Jesus Christ - they wanted a worldly “position.”

That's why **the highest position a person should desire to achieve is to become a Christian**. To be, positionally, “in Christ.”

It leads us to ask ourselves -

What calling are we relying on?

What foundation are we resting on?

Do we believe ourselves justified because of our parents?

Our learning? Our circumstances?

Or even - especially! - do we consider ourselves favored of God because of times past when we were extravagantly privileged to have been part of some work of the Lord?

Those things are not what make us His.

If those are what we're trusting in when we walk onto the field of battle, we are dangerously exposed.

That brings us to our second point which you'll see on your outline, mark it down in your hearts as Gospel truth that:

2) Your enemy knows - and will expose - your weak points of unbelief (vv 15-16)

Your enemy knows, and will expose, ***your*** weak points of unbelief.

Your enemy takes joy in exposing your state of disbelief because he is not subject to a man's authority - only Christ's. Remember the amazement of the seventy disciples coming back in Luke 10?

"Then the seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name!"" (v17)

Jesus made sure to rapidly straighten out their thinking in verse 20:

*"...do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you,
but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven."*

Take note! God is under no obligation to protect the one arrogant enough to face the enemy resting or relying in their own position - even if that one were a Christian!

Might He do so out of mercy? Could He intervene to care for His Son's bride? Of course he could.

But the Father is under no **obligation** to keep us from the foolish consequences of our own mistakes. To the contrary, it is these painful wanderings in the briar patch which God often uses to greatest effect in conforming us more and more to the image and likeness of Christ Jesus.

Now, if such is the fate for those He loves, what then for the pretenders?

Man may be fooled by false professors and doubters who put up a good facade, but when you're in the fight, your foe is NOT. No amount of bluster or false bravado will cause the enemy to give up his spot. See how he replies in verse 15:

"Jesus, I know."

One of my favorite words, this word: "*Ginosko!*"

This is not head-knowledge. This is an intimate knowledge. Used of husbands and wives to imply intimate relations. Jesus uses it in John 10 about us, did you know? Verse 14:

"I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own."

So what is this spirit saying?

“Jesus? Oh, yes. Him I know. I know Who He is. I know what He is. See, I used to work for Him. I can tell you in every circumstance what He would do. I know those whom He would send.”

... and the demon continues:

“and Paul I know...” (Acts 19:15)

This “know” is a different Greek word.

This one is *“epistamai”* and Strong’s tells us it means ‘to put one’s attention on.’

The spirit is saying “Paul? Yes, I’ve certainly noticed that one.”

But the introductions are over as the demon issues his assessment:

*“... who are **you**?”*

The evil spirit knows the score. He is “Situationally Aware.”

He is IN the house.

He is the highest authority on the scene.

He IS able to prevail.

When we face trials and temptations, if there's anything of 'Us' in us, instead of:

"I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20)

...then the demon knows he has authority and he will exercise it.

So when the 7 Sons showed up flashing their spiritual tin badges, the demon knew better.

"Jesus, I know," he told them.

Ask yourself - what is your defense?

Are you setting your stand on rituals, works, self-imposed punishments? Paul warns us in Colossians 2: 18-19 that none of these are sufficient to meet the enemy who is stationed in the house you enter:

*"Let no one cheat you of your reward,
taking delight in false humility and worship of angels,
intruding into those things which he has not seen,
vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind,
And not holding fast to the Head!"*

Don't be fooled, because your enemy is not. You face a foe who knows the Lord intimately, who will quickly spy every weakness in your armor, every crack in your shield, every time you've left your sword back home, unsharpened.

Do you see our duty here, brothers and sisters?

We will face battle, you must count on that. You will enter "houses" of opposition and combat, and so our challenge and application is that:

Believers must pay attention to and strengthen their spiritual armor *before* the day of battle

Try and re-dedicate yourself to this task before you engage in the fight,

(repeat)

You might ask, 'How is this done?'

Paul gives us maintenance instructions in chapter 4 of Ephesians. The whole chapter is our User's Manual, but verses 22 and 23 are of special note for believers looking to keep their gear shining bright:

*"...put off, concerning your former conduct,
the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts,
and be renewed in the spirit of your mind..."*

Paul says the end result of this care is that we will be able to prevent “giving place to the devil.” A place for the devil to take a stand, a place to attack from, a place to sling his darts at our weak spots.

If we are prayerful and honest in asking the Holy Spirit to reveal our sins and weaknesses; if we are faithful in petitioning the Father for the grace to overcome our failings and put to death the sins of the flesh, then we will indeed find ourselves best able to stand in that day -

- and that is the reason that

Believers must pay attention to and strengthen their spiritual armor *before* the day of battle

We must do it quickly, because the battle is at the gates. It rages around us, every day, and much of that is because of our third point, you’ll see it on your outline on the right side:

3) False professions are dealt with publicly

If you’re a man-pleaser, it all looks good to the crowd - it even may seem effective!

Maybe we’ve even fooled ourselves?

But when the battle is joined, a fake will soon be made apparent. There is no space for fakers in the ranks of God’s host. And - frequently - God will cause this to happen in full view.

Through the Seven Sons, God gives to us here an example, and a warning, of the inevitable fall of any who are relying on anything other than Christ's blood.

The Sons claimed to be able to perform "magic." They claimed a special right to approach God's throne and gain his favor - but why? It was because they would do something - speak or chant or sit in a circle or any number of things - and that this act would move the hand of God to act in a manner which is un-natural and supernatural. That their special mystical actions would oblige the Lord to act contrary to His revealed will and common grace.

In short, magic is best defined by the expression:

"If I do something or act a certain way," "...then God will respond."

But aren't we also guilty of this?

You may recognize it even today:

"If I participate in this cleansing ritual, then *that* will make dear Aunt Tessie's goiter go down."

"If I pray the rosary all night, my dying mother will come home from the hospital."

"If I follow some of the rules of the Levite priesthood, then God will be more impressed with me and maybe He'll overlook that other thing I'm doing that I shouldn't be doing."

Doing these sorts of things can be equivalent to what these Seven Sons were doing with their false magic. Examine yourselves and be sure! Paul tells us in Colossians 2:23 that such acts:

“... are of no value ...”

When the battle is joined, that is not the time to discover your armor and weapon have no value! You're unguarded, and see how quickly the enemy attacks!

He:

“leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them...- ” (Acts 19:16)

The important word in this verse is the one for “overpowered,” and that word is

“katakryieuo”

The literal meaning of the verb here is “to bring down and establish lordship upon.”

Put another way, this evil spirit showed them who's truly in charge.

Why did this happen? Why did evil prevail?

Because these men had no authority from God.

The Seven Sons went up against a member of the heavenly host - fallen, yes, but still subject to the Great Commander - and they claimed to be acting under that Commander's orders.

Now, we know they lied, as the passage states:

“...they took it upon themselves to call the Name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits...” (Acts 19:13)

But understand, these men were claiming to be superior and fit to prevail because God had given them authority - when, in truth, they did not know Him.

Are we pretending as well?

Did God allow such a challenge to His Name go unanswered?

He did not in this instance! The Seven Sons of Sceva were revealed as powerless frauds. All seven were stripped of their fine robes, beaten bloody and thrown into the street, as all of Ephesus looked on to see how their profession of Christ was proven to be a lie.

This is no strange thing, to see God defend his Name.

Jesus - that Name above all Names, that exclusive Name given under heaven by which men might be saved, that one and only method of salvation given to men -

That Name will be defended by the Father most vigorously.

Why?

Because a loving Father will not allow the gospel of Christ to be cast into doubt in the minds of those He is calling to faith. You've heard it said that we are ambassadors for God's Kingdom. So we are, and so we must be diligent in staying true to our calling. This action, however severe, was in fact a mercy to these sons, who needed to have their false religion exposed and revealed. Yes, God has vigorously defended His name, but He has also graciously acted in such a way that these false sons would be discovered - and perhaps turned from error to true worship.

Verse 17 in our passage tells us:

*“... fear fell on them all,
and the name of the Lord Jesus was **magnified.**”*

We believers should always seek to magnify the Name of Christ through our reliance on His grace. The good news of salvation is that treasured message we are to be proclaiming, as a living testimony, and that’s our third point of application today:

Christians magnify the Name of Jesus by the testimony of both our words and our lives

We are “appointed!”

The enemy can not - will not! - exercise Lordship over us.

We already have a Lord, one who has told us in Luke 10:19:

“I give you the authority... over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you.”

But if we have allowed ourselves to think that we hold any sway over any part of our walk, instead of relying on Christ; if we have removed Christ even for a second from the throne of Lordship in our lives, we risk a spiritual beating.

Are you in danger? Lost in enemy territory? Flee to the embassy!

Get back to the cross!

*“For You, LORD, are good, and ready to forgive,
and abundant in mercy to those who call upon you.” (Psalm 86:5)*

We don't call on the name of Jesus for glory, but for mercy!

We call on Christ, asking that He would give us all more and more grace,
because we as Christians are to:

...magnify the Name of Jesus by the testimony of both our words and our lives

This brings us to our final point, you'll see it on the right side and it's a joyful one:

4) The display of the truth brings repentance and salvation (v 18-20)

Let's quickly look at the results of these frauds being shamed:

“...many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds.

*Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together
and burned them in the sight of all.*

And they counted up the value of them, and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver.

So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.”

Believers confess!

Sinners repent - at great cost and publicly!

The Word prevails!

God's getting a lot of mileage out of exposing these frauds.

Ephesus was a city famous for its Magic - but when the people saw a true display of power, they came in droves and turned away from the hopeless practices that had snared them.

They have known the disappointment of false hopes left unfulfilled. They have known false promises which went unmet. They have known false comforts which became a bitter cup to drink.

We have known these times. We have known these fears!

But God.

But God, in causing these false towers to fall, showed to the world that He has the power to overcome any situation.

"...many who believed came, confessing and telling their deeds...."

Did you hear that?

Believers can get caught up in thinking that some habit or ritual is the thing that has saved us, or that **this** is the practice that is keeping us on the straight and narrow and right in God's sight.

We do such because - deep down - we do not truly believe God's promises.

This is why He's in the miracle business, as Jesus Himself says:

*"Believe Me - that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me -
or, else, believe Me for the sake of the Works themselves."* (John 14:11)

If we do not believe our sins are covered, if we fail to trust that He has our best welfare squarely in His sight, we'll find that we remain under that fear spoken of in Hebrews 10, that:

"... certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation ..."

We are afraid!

But our passage today shows the Almighty is gracious in using even this instance to remind His children that our hope and rest lie in Christ. To truly know that we can rely and rest in the finished work of Christ as that only remedy necessary for whatever situation we find ourselves in.

We've seen how God caused the false claims of the Seven Sons to be shown as false to the city, and that gives us reason to examine ourselves - but that's not the end of the story.

The truly astonishing thing happens in verse 20, as

"...the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed."

This was a town steeped in mystical practices, a bastion where people's hopes and fears were exploited. But when the true word of God was preached in the streets, the result was an entire city won for Christ. We may look at our own heart's hidden alleys, peer into dark

doorways and fear the evil spirits which have ruled there in the past. But this example of Scripture shows us that faith in His Name prevails upon the whole of the city - and that is good news for us!

It is good news for us because we no longer need to fear. We no longer have to wish on a blind hope. We are able to rely on Christ because we may be:

*“...confident of this very thing:
the He who has begun a good work in you
will complete it until the day of Christ Jesus.” (Phil 1:6)*

Our application is a peculiar and seemingly illogical truth, but it's true nonetheless:

Believers should gratefully view God's chastisements as His loving efforts to bring us comfort.

Does that sound strange? It sure does! But when Jesus said:

“I will never leave you, nor forsake you”

in Hebrews 13:5, what he's saying is,

“I have seen everything about you. I know every dark alley, every angry thought, every faithless fear. I know you. And even so, I will never leave you. My Father gave you to Me. I paid for you to be with Me always. How could I forget you?”

As we learn from experience that He is faithful to His word, then we - like that spirit - can say:

“Jesus, I **know**.”

Since Revelation 3 tells us:

“...as many as I love, I rebuke and chasten...”

... then even the times of rebuke should be viewed as those times when the Father is lovingly refining and molding us more into the image of Christ; and so it's true that

Believers should gratefully view God's chastisements as His loving efforts to bring us comfort.

In closing, let me ask about your Situational Awareness.

Do you know where you stand?

Do you know your enemy?

Are you under authority of your King?

All the times we've been false professors, haven't we fought and failed and fallen?

We find ourselves left naked and bleeding - sometimes in full view of the whole world.

Or maybe you have never truly known Him at all.

Are you tired of faking it?

Of living in the dread of waiting for the curtain to fall and expose your lack, your shame, your nakedness?

Come to Jesus Christ - and see some something far superior to magic occur.

See a hardened heart of stone turned to a living heart of flesh.

Yes, even ours! Even a believer may have a conscience seared with a hot iron - but Christ can make even that thing new again.

“ ‘The Word is near you,

in your mouth and in your heart’

(that is the word of faith which we preach):

that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus

and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead,

you will be saved. “ (Romans 10:8-9)

Call for an airlift out of that minefield of sin, of doubt, of guilt.

Call on the Name of Christ!

(Pastor Pat prayer)