



Breaking Spiritual Strongholds

INTRODUCTION

Right, so let's get into the message for today... We have two more Sunday's of our breaking barriers series. We are going to be starting a series in the book of James soon, but more about that will follow in the next few Sundays.

But today brings us to our next barrier! We have been building a big wall here at the front of the Church – the question is... how are we going to knock this stuff down in our lives? Each of these barriers represent something that is a blockage that can get in the way of our relationships with each other... and with God.

So how do we break these things? You've probably come across some messages that tell you – just think positive! Believe in yourself! You can do it! But you know what, if you're tried that, you will know, that will-power, does not seem to work! And if it does ... it's only for a short time.

So no... we need something more than will-power to break down these barriers in our lives – we need the power of God. Amen?!

Please turn with me in your bibles to Joshua 6. Joshua chapter 6 contains the incredible story of a huge barrier, a physical barrier that stood in the way of God's people. It was the wall of Jericho. And I want to read the story to you, just to remind you of how God break's barriers in our lives...

Joshua 6:1-20 (Read from my bible)

Now the gates of Jericho were securely barred because of the Israelites. No one went out and no one came in. ² Then the LORD said to Joshua, "See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men. ³ March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days.

⁴ Have seven priests carry trumpets of rams' horns in front of the ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets. ⁵ When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have the whole army give a loud shout;

then the wall of the city will collapse and the army will go up, everyone straight in." ⁶ So Joshua son of Nun called the priests and said to them, "Take up the ark of the covenant of the LORD and have seven priests carry trumpets in front of it." ⁷ And he ordered the army, "Advance!

March around the city, with an armed guard going ahead of the ark of the LORD." ⁸ When Joshua had spoken to the people, the seven priests carrying the seven trumpets before the LORD went forward, blowing their trumpets, and the ark of the LORD's covenant followed them.

⁹ The armed guard marched ahead of the priests who blew the trumpets, and the rear guard followed the ark. All this time the trumpets were sounding. ¹⁰ But Joshua had commanded the army, "Do not give a war cry, do not raise your voices, do not say a word until the day I tell you to shout. Then shout!"

¹¹ So he had the ark of the LORD carried around the city, circling it once. Then the army returned to camp and spent the night there. ¹² Joshua got up early the next morning and the priests took up the ark of the LORD. ¹³ The seven priests carrying the seven trumpets went forward,

marching before the ark of the LORD and blowing the trumpets. The armed men went ahead of them and the rear guard followed the ark of the LORD, while the trumpets kept sounding. ¹⁴ So on the second day they marched around the city once and returned to the camp. They did this for six days.

¹⁵ On the seventh day, they got up at daybreak and marched around the city seven times in the same manner, except that on that day they circled the city seven times. ¹⁶ The seventh time around, when the priests sounded the trumpet blast, Joshua commanded the army, "Shout! For the LORD has given you the city!

17 The city and all that is in it are to be devoted to the LORD. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall be spared, because she hid the spies we sent. 18 But keep away from the devoted things, so that you will not bring about your own destruction by taking any of them.

Otherwise you will make the camp of Israel liable to destruction and bring trouble on it. 19 All the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron are sacred to the LORD and must go into his treasury.”

20 When the trumpets sounded, the army shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the men gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so everyone charged straight in, and they took the city.

Wow! Incredible stuff... When the trumpets sounded, the army shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the men gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so everyone charged straight in, and they took the city.

So here is my question... Did they just attack the wall head on? No. They never stood there, summoning all their strength and will-power, and charged the wall. No. They never did that. Instead... they obeyed God... and approached this barrier from a spiritual perspective.

I'm sure you will agree. Trumpet blowing... and marching... is not really a conventional approach to barrier breaking, right?! Most of us would rather go the dynamite route – or be like a Navy Seal Team and set some plastic explosive on those walls... but we need to acknowledge, that when it comes to the spiritual realm, we do not have the strength to overcome sin and strongholds by ourselves. We also have to acknowledge... that there is a spiritual component, these are not just bad habits – these are not just bad ideas. Whether we like it and realise it or not, we are in a spiritual battle. And spiritual battle has to be fought in a spiritual way. So firstly this morning...

1. SPIRITUAL WARFARE IS REAL

Just in case we have anyone here today that does not believe in the reality of spiritual warfare, the Apostle Paul teaches Christians the following in the book of Ephesians 6.

Ephesians 6:10

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against

the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

¹³ Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place,

¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

¹⁸ And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.

This is all out spiritual war – Church, let me remind you... Satan loves all of these barriers up here – they do his work for him... dividing people, dividing communities and churches – stopping us from living the way God has made for us. So today I want to add one more barrier - Strongholds. Strongholds. Now...

2. WHAT IS A STRONGHOLD?

A stronghold is a term commonly used to describe a thought... or a belief... that is wrong... but that we are stuck in... and not easily moved from. In military terms... a stronghold is a like a fort or a strong place... where a soldier can be safe – it is not easy to destroy or break. The Apostle Paul teaches us about the enemies Strongholds in 2 Corinthians...

2 Corinthians 10.3-6

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. ⁴ The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.

There is our word. And here we get some insight into what a stronghold is, **verse 5;**

⁵ We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

The word used here for stronghold is *ochyroma*... which literally means fortress. Strongholds are those things in our lives – like lies, thoughts, sins that Satan can use to keep us from God.

A stronghold is like a fortress of the mind that is made up of lies. And these lies try to hide the true nature of God. So strongholds are built of lies and constructed brick by brick.

Many Christians sing songs of freedom, but are never truly free because of strongholds.

Often it is something that if we dealt with quickly it would not have become an issue, but over time it gets bigger and bigger.

For example, if you have been hurt by somebody... and feel anger towards them, the longer we let that anger sit... the more it can become a barrier as anger festers and unforgiveness grows. Paul calls this an “enemy foothold” in Ephesians.

Ephesians 4:27

Do not give the devil a foothold.

Remember as a child, when one of your siblings was chasing you in the house, and you ran to your room, and slammed the door, but just as you were about to get it closed to lock it, they managed to get their foot in the way, and they had a foothold on you! Once there is that foothold – it’s impossible to get that door closed until you get that foot out the way!

Well, it’s no different in the spiritual realm. Satan loves to get footholds in our lives. And once he has that hold, through hurt, or some other offense, he loves to remind us of it all, and lies to us that we are justified to feel the hurt and not to forgive.

Addiction is another form of stronghold – whether your addiction be lust, or a drug, alcohol, sex, food or sports etc. you may feel like you want to give up your addiction, but it is hard and too strong. It is not just a matter of strength and will power, but a real spiritual battle.

So let me give you an illustration as to how this works. I need three volunteers to come and join me on stage...

1. Body
2. Soul
3. Spirit

Man is a triune being, because he is created in the image of God. God said, “Let us make man in Our image!” Here are two verses that help us to understand this...

1 Thessalonians 5:23

²³ May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 4:2

¹² For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

Right, now I also **need someone to be God** for us in this illustration! Another volunteer please...

Right, now I need some more volunteers to show you how strongholds work...

I need a volunteer to be **a spirit of anger!** Just pretend! I want you to come and sit here at... feet and hold on to his leg.

Next I need a **spirit of rejection**. I want you to come and stand here...

Next I need a **spirit of fear**. I want you to come and stand here...

So you can all see how this works... very often, we can have these strongholds in our lives. And I know someone is asking... **“Can a Christian be demon possessed?”** and my answer would be – No. Possession can only happen in a non-believer, who welcomes Satan in as a Lord and saviour. But there’s nothing stopping the enemy from **influencing**, and **gaining footholds / strongholds** in our lives when we sin, and when we allow him to latch on when we live in unforgiveness and other sin.

Often strongholds can develop from an experience of trauma or hurt – like feelings of hurt, anger or rejection that have not been dealt with. This could lead to deceit, bitterness, depression, jealousy, feelings of rejection, pride, rebellion, and control issues.

Breaking down a stronghold is not just a matter of squashing a bad habit, but also of correcting our thinking so we see things from God’s point of view.

So, **How do you know if you have a stronghold?** Well, often other people see it more easily than you do! It’s often a blind spot for us. But all strongholds have a root, access points, things like;

- Trauma
- Inadequate, or controlling parents
- Conditional love

- Performance based acceptance
- Domineering and discipline through fear
- You embarrassed me!
- Rejection
- Word curses, you will never amount to anything
- Lack of exposure to biblical truth of who God is

All of the above can cause someone to develop a stronghold. **Some main strongholds would include;**

- Bitterness
- Jealousy
- Confusion doubt and unbelief
- Rejection
- Pride
- Religiousness - lack of grace, fear, unworthy, critical
- Rebellion
- Fear - inadequacy, inferiority.
- Control
- Sexual impurity
- Witchcraft

So how then do we break strongholds in our lives?

3. HOW TO BREAK A STRONGHOLD?

The key to breaking down strongholds is centred in the knowledge and understanding of the character of God and seeing how God sees you. Breaking strongholds is only achieved by the careful guidance of the Spirit. Remember, we don't fight spiritual battle by charging the walls. That won't work. We need to deal with it in a spiritual way.

But there is no secret method or trick to this, it is really only when we let the Holy Spirit work in us that strongholds can be broken – when God's word soaks into our hearts and minds. But here are some of the steps that I see from scripture. I call them the 7 R's. Firstly,

RECOGNISE

The first step is to recognize it. Recognise that you have a problem – a stronghold. Maybe you see that you have a sinful re-occurring pattern in your life. Whether it is a habit, or an addiction, or a way of thinking, or a way of responding to or treating others.

Psalm 139:23 is a great prayer; **“Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.”**

Ask yourself, ask the Lord, is there something that keeps popping up in my life? And, if I am not in control, and it's not the Holy Spirit, then what is it? Is anger in control, is unforgiveness in control? Is lust in control? What is mastering you? And then...

REALISE

Realise that you cannot overcome this by yourself – Maybe you have tried and failed. And here you need to realise that in your own strength you cannot do it – it is too strong. Like Israel facing that huge wall of Jericho, it seems impossible to break it down in your own strength. I think many Christians are in denial – they believe that they can control their sin – well, you know what, you can't, and we all need God's help.

1 John 1:8 is a sober reminder; **If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.**

Now here's the next thing;

REVELATION

What do I mean by this? Well, very simply, ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you the root of the sin. That's what revelation is, a revealing. Maybe there was an event in your life, which you have long forgotten about, in which pain or hurt was inflicted, and the stronghold grew from there. Ask God to reveal things to you about yourself. This is what the Spirit of God takes. Listen to the words of John 16;

John 16:8-10 & 13 **When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹ about sin, because people do not believe in me; ¹⁰ about righteousness,**

....¹³ But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

Ask God, the Spirit of truth, to give you revelation, to guide you into all the truth. But then here's the next thing... You've got to be willing to...

RELEASE & FORGIVE

So much of deliverance, is simply about forgiveness. It is about forgiving others who have hurt us.

You don't get deliverance without forgiveness.

- Are you able to forgive the person? God gives a special grace.
- And people are able to forgive the most horrendous things.
- It's never easy. It's a choice.
- If you are struggling to forgive...
- Remember what Jesus did for you on the cross...
- He forgave you... And you need to forgive.

Colossians 3:13 says **Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.**

This is so important. Forgiveness. Then next.

REPENT

Repentance. This is not a word you hear much about these days. But I tell you what, you're going to hear a lot about it in this church, because it is hugely important spiritually. If we want to walk in freedom from strongholds, we also need to repent of the sin in our hearts. Repentance is a turn around in our thinking and an about turn back to the way God thinks and sees things.

John the Baptist preached; **Repent! for the Kingdom of God is near!** And today I also preach; **Repent! For the Kingdom of God is near!** We preach a gospel of repentance! What does repentance do?

Colossians 2:13-15 says **When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, ¹⁴ having cancelled the charge of our legal indebtedness,**

which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

Friends, when God reveals it, repent of it. Right, just two more, and they are both important! Here's the next one...

REBUKE

That sounds like a very old word that your grandfather used to do to the naughty grandchildren! But it's important. We need to rebuke any involvement Satan has in the strongholds in our lives and influence he may have had. If you follow Jesus, you are a child of God and Satan has no authority in your life. So you need to learn to resist him.

James 4:7 says **Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.**

Friends, often when you are set free from things – they try to come back into your life. So it's no good just sitting back and chilling. You need to walk in your deliverance!!! Submit yourselves to God, and walk in your deliverance! Lastly today...

RENEW

This is so important. Once we are delivered from things, we need to renew our minds and fill them with God's truth. We do this by being aware of our thought life and also filling our minds and hearts with God's word. Remember what the Apostle Paul taught us;

Romans 12:2 **Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.**

And in **Philippians 4:8** **Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.**

So let me draw things to a close...

CONCLUSION

Do you long for freedom in your life? Carrying these barriers is difficult and heavy work. Smashing them on our own is so hard – this is not the way that God has created you to live, here is his plan;

Galatians 5:1

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

Jesus wants to set people free, do you know why? Because they are not free.

So what are your next steps? One option is to go home and spend time working through these 7 Rs. Another option is to come forward for prayer at the end of this service.

A third option is to chat to one of our pastors to set up a time to chat and pray through the stronghold together. Whatever you do, don't do nothing! Your

relationships, your peace of mind, your walk with God, all show that you cannot maintain these strongholds and live the life of freedom in Christ that Jesus offers you.

Let's pray together...

THE END