



By Neil Smith on Sunday 4 November 2018 Am & Pm

INTRODUCTION (SUPERNATURAL)

Let's get into our message today... We have been in a series called Supernatural going through the book of Acts. A quick recap... so far we have looked at;

- Supernatural **Holy Spirit**
- Supernatural **Boldness**
- Supernatural **Community**
- Supernatural **Healing**
- Supernatural **Generosity**

Then we took a break over last Sunday's Missions Weekend, but I would love to view that break as our exposure to Supernatural **Missions!** Much of the rest of the book of Acts contains with stories of the first missionary journeys – in fact, interestingly, mostly surrounding Greece – and so while we won't be looking at all of these stories, I want to encourage you to read through them, and catch the heart of the early church that was passionate about Supernatural Missions!

Today we are going to look at what happened on one of those missions trips – when the believers encountered a man who was a sorcerer! In the light of this past Wednesday being Halloween, where the world focusses on glamorizing ghosts, zombies, witches and all those kind of things, it seems rather fitting that we look at the early churches encounter with a sorcerer – and I have called today's message;

SUPERNATURAL POWER

So - What do you do when you bump into big scary powerful people?

I recall a few years ago, my friend and I were at gym in Port Elizabeth, we were still youngsters, and after our gym session we hit the showers. My friend Andrew, who you have probably heard Tristan and I share about on a few occasions is a bit of a practical joker. So he found the tap that the cleaners used in his shower cubicle, and thought it would be a great idea to flick handfuls of ice cold water over his shower screen into my cubicle where I was enjoying a steaming hot shower.

The thing he never realized though, is that after we had both entered the showers, a monster of a man, a big muscled brute, had entered the shower cubicle between us, and instead of the cold water hitting me, it was hitting him! Andrew thought the grunts and moans were from me, so he just carried on thinking his plan was working – and in no time we had a very big, powerful man, who was very angry with us!

The story ended... with Andrew and I getting out of the shower block as quick as possible! That was a very scary encounter with a very physically powerful person! So, lesson is – don't flick cold water at big bodybuilders who take steroids and have too much testosterone inside of them!

Jokes aside...

I've had other experiences with spiritually powerful people too. I won't go into too much detail, but I once had demon possessed man chase me around a car with a huge shard of glass trying to stab me. Fortunately, the police arrived in time, arrested him, and the police took him away with him bashing around inside the back of the police bakkie. That was an encounter with someone who was being spiritually empowered by something not from God. It was a scary experience.

What do you do when you bump into big scary powerful people?

As we come to our message this morning, I want to say this - Our God is all-powerful, but we realise as we look at the world around us - that He is not the only source of power. Halloween reminds of us that – there is good power (God) and there is bad power (Satan). For many, Halloween is just a simple kid's fun event – its about dressing up, and getting sweets, but at the root of it, what many people don't realize, is a very spiritually powerful time, and activity of the demonic. So discernment, and wisdom is needed!

Because the truth is, there are many different powers in the world, but there is only one Power who is good, loving, forgiving, almighty and that is our God. The Apostles learnt this in the book of Acts when they encountered a sorcerer.

So let's go there today – to the book of Acts chapter 8, verse 9.

ACTS 8:9-25

Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great,¹⁰ and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, "This man is rightly called the Great Power of God."

¹¹ They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his sorcery. ¹² But when they believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

¹³ Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw. ¹⁴ When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to Samaria.

¹⁵ When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit, ¹⁶ because the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷ Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

¹⁸ When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money ¹⁹ and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

²⁰ Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! ²¹ You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God.

²² Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord in the hope that he may forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. ²³ For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin."

²⁴ Then Simon answered, "Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me." ²⁵ After they had further proclaimed the word of the Lord and testified about Jesus, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages.

Here is the first point I want to make today... It is important that we understand the reality of this truth...

THERE ARE DIFFERENT POWERS – GOOD & EVIL

Now I do not want to be misunderstood this morning. I don't want anyone thinking that I'm teaching some kind of new age thing – where you have two equally strong powers in the universe. Ying and Yang, the Darkness and the Light. You see this in so much New Age and other teaching out there. Even the Star Wars movies, with the Force!

So let me be clear. God is all-powerful, and Satan is not. God and Satan are not peers on equal footing. As believers, we are on the winning side, we've read the book, and we know who wins – Amen!? But that does not change the fact that there is still other powers at work in this world, that we need to be aware of, not afraid of, but be on our guard against.

So, here in our passage we meet Simon. Simon the Sorcerer, sometimes referred to as Simon Magus, or Simon of Gitta.

This Simon was mentioned by the early church historians as being famous at the time – he was basically was a celebrity. Partly because of the amazing powerful magic he did through sorcery – I guess he was the Harry Potter of his day, and let me say, this seems to have been a legitimate spiritual power, but also, partially because he was a great spin doctor, verse 9 says - **He boasted that he was someone great, ¹⁰ and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, “This man is rightly called the Great Power of God.”**

But then Simon met Philip, the Apostle, who also did amazing signs and wonders, and preached about Jesus. We then have this strange story of Simon seemingly submits to Jesus through baptism, but we still see that he is still power obsessed. How many of you know that we have many people in this world who are power obsessed? Simon was one of those guys – he wanted power.

Friends, we are living in a time when people are power hungry. We see it in politics, we see it in the gym, we see it in the workplace, we see it in cults, we even see it in relationships, we see it in marriage. Sadly, we even see it in the church. People who are looking for power. Who will do anything to get power, and to keep power.

I want to say – if you come across someone like this – be careful. Be wise. And if you recognize something of this in you, submit to God, and pray that he would forgive and heal you.

It seems that Simon’s motivation was to get to the power that Philip had – so he even offered to buy it!

The greed of Simon is remembered in the modern word *simony* which means “using religion as a means of profit.” May we never be guilty of Simony, please Lord.

So Peter rebuked him: **Peter answered: “May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! ²¹ You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God.**

What can we learn from this? Don’t get money hungry. Don’t get power hungry. But also...

GOD WARNS US ABOUT GETTING INVOLVED WITH THE WRONG POWER

You see there are powers, but not all powers are good and from God. The bible warns us repeatedly about this. Sorcery, as one example, is strongly condemned by God, but was common in the ancient world;

DEUTERONOMY 18:9-13

When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. ¹⁰ Let no one be found among you who sacrifices their son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft,

¹¹ or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. ¹² Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD; because of these

same detestable practices the LORD your God will drive out those nations before you. ¹³ You must be blameless before the LORD your God.

So while some acts and demonstrations of power, can be no more than illusions of the mind, David Copperfield stuff, others can be legitimately supernaturally empowered by Satan, in an attempt to discredit the power of God. Here we see human sacrifice, satanic occult behaviour, divination, sorcery, interpretation of omens, witchcraft, casting of spells, being a medium or spiritist, who tries to consult the dead – these things are all detestable to the LORD.

The reason that God does not want us dabbling in this stuff – is because he knows it is no good for us. Playing in the devils backyard is not a good idea.

Consider what Jesus said about the end times;

MATTHEW 24:24

²⁴ For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. ²⁵ See, I have told you ahead of time.

The Apostle Paul also warns us about the end times and the spirit of the anti-Christ;

2 THESSALONIANS 2:9

⁹ The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with how Satan works. He will use all sorts of displays of power through signs and wonders that serve the lie, ¹⁰ and all the ways that wickedness deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.

We once had an author Landa Cope speak here at King of Kings – she said just because you can speak to the dead it does not mean that it is a good idea. Who you think you are speaking to, is probably much more likely something else entirely. You see these things, these powers and evil spirits are real, whether you believe it or not. They influence, they deceive, so...

WHAT HAPPENED TO SIMON THE SORCERER?

After this event, the Bible never again refers to Simon the Sorcerer. Sadly, it would seem that according to early church writers, like Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Jerome, that he went on, and never became a true Christian, he continued his sorcery, possibly even founding Gnosticism itself.

But, we can't be 100% sure of that, so we are not sure of exactly what happened to this guy – what we are sure of though, is that playing with spiritual power that is not from God is dangerous business. Let's learn from Simon church, don't play with fire, you will get burned, and be careful of those claiming to possess supernatural abilities who are not living a life submitted to Christ.

Beware also of those claiming to be Christians, who try to buy the gift of God with money, for their “heart is not right before God.” Chilling words. And I don’t know about you, but I don’t want my heart to not be right with God.

You see friends, Simon’s heart was crooked. His heart was not right, literally, not straight before God. His heart needed to be changed.

You see, Simon had a form of belief, but it was not true saving faith – amazement and excitement about signs and wonders is not saving faith, saving faith is true repentance, and a heartfelt recognition of sinfulness and a turning to Jesus with a humble trust in him for forgiveness.

Don’t misapply the warning though – I don’t believe we are to avoid signs and wonders because we are fearful of abuse – we just need to make sure that our hearts, and our motives are in line with Jesus.

So, here’s the next thing I guess we need to address.. How do we know the difference between innocent fun and fantasy, and dangerous spiritual power?

WHAT IS HARMLESS FUN AND WHAT IS A DOORWAY TO THE OCCULT?

I think we need to exercise a lot of discernment here. Take for example certain books and movies – I guess the most popular and controversial one being Harry Potter written by JK Rowling. You’ve even got Christian-based works by CS Lewis – the Chronicles of Narnia, and Tolkien’s Lord of the Rings. I know it can be a tricky thing to work out. Personally, I don’t like Harry Potter one bit, but I recognize people have different opinions! All I would say is please exercise caution and discernment.

I think as parents, this is a struggle for many of us, and so many have divided opinions of what is harmless and what is harmful. You see, I believe that we need to be careful about what we expose ourselves to, and especially what we expose our children too. What may seem like harmless fun could be the first step to something more dangerous.

But before you get all defensive, let’s agree on this, I really believe that there is a spiritual battle for the hearts of our children and exposing them to ‘evil’, just for fun, is not okay. So, ask yourselves what you or your children might want to start emulating. What’s the message that is coming from a book or a movie? How closely do things from the occult in the movies or books resemble real occultish things? If you’ve real got spell books next to the Harry Potter books written by real Wiccans, real witches, real occultists. Remember that people love to copy what they think is cool – especially kids, they love to emulate their heroes and the things they do. So just be careful, be discerning, that’s all I am saying.

Be aware that there is truth and real power in the occult, Satanism, witches, the Tokolosh, Mediums, Witchdoctors, Psychic Phenomena. Don’t play with this stuff.

Recently when I was in London, I had some time off between things, and I did some exploring, I found this stunning old church building just over the Thames River at one of the main bridge crossings. It was one of the most beautiful old church buildings I have ever seen. Exquisite stone masonry, beautiful stained glass windows, Oak

Trees all around, I went inside to look around, they had a coffee shop where I had a cappuccino and caught up on some emails. But when I went inside the church it had a very distinct wrongness about it. I felt like I was being watched.

Well guess what, it was the very same church where they had filmed the Hollywood Horror Movie The Exorcist. One of the local pastors told me that it had been a healthy church once, but ever since that movie, the congregation had dwindled, and the church had basically died. All they had keeping them afloat was a coffee shop.

Ephesians 4:27 and do not give the devil a foothold.

Whether it be books like Harry Potter, reading your horoscope just for fun or dressing up for Halloween, Ouija boards just for a laugh – anything that makes evil feel like fun or attractive is not something I want to expose myself or my kids to – it normalises it - and I believe it can be the first step towards falling for a wrong power. Simon in our Acts passage was able to trick lots of people into following him and the church historians even said some claimed he was a god. Power is not something to mess with, even as ‘harmless fun.’

But I do not want anyone to slip into fear today... because here is the next thing I need to share...

ALL POWERS WILL SUBMIT TO JESUS

There is another story that takes place a bit later in the book of Acts – this time, not a sorcerer, but a fortune teller...

ACTS 16:16-19

Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. ¹⁷ She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.” ¹⁸ She kept this up for many days.

Finally Paul became so annoyed that he turned around and said to the spirit, “In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!” At that moment the spirit left her. ¹⁹ When her owners realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities.

The Apostles had another interesting power encounter in Acts – this time it is a slave girl who we are told had a spirit, but the spirit recognised that Paul was actually teaching the truth. While the spirit recognised the truth, it was not a good spirit – remember, we are taught that even the demons recognise Jesus.

James 2:19 You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

Yet Jesus had to only speak and these demons flee – that is the good news. God is all powerful – there is no power greater than Him. He can deliver you from any power that is oppressing you – He is able. Amen?!

I also always remember this verse which reminds us of the power of Jesus.

Matthew 8: 28-32

When he arrived at the other side in the region of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men coming from the tombs met him. They were so violent that no one could pass that way. ²⁹ “What do you want with us, Son of God?” they shouted. “Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?”

³⁰ Some distance from them a large herd of pigs was feeding. ³¹ The demons begged Jesus, “If you drive us out, send us into the herd of pigs.” ³² He said to them, “Go!” So they came out and went into the pigs, and the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and died in the water.

All He said was Go! That is the power of Jesus. The same with the fortune-telling slave girl - **In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!**

Church, whose name has the power? Not Paul, not Silas, but Jesus – there is no power greater than the power of Jesus! Amen?! So... today...

WHOSE POWER ARE YOU UNDER?

Whether you have named it or not... we are all under a power – the power of success, the power of addiction, the power of sin strongholds, or else we are under the power of Christ.

It is not my intention to scare anyone this morning, but I want the reality of the world we live in to sink in – we are in a supernatural battle. There is God’s power and there are evil powers. But if you follow Jesus... then do not be afraid... for He is mighty and powerful!

But maybe you feel that you have given a foot hold or authority to a wrong power in your life. I want to encourage you to submit to Jesus. Get your heart right with God. I also want to encourage you to make an appointment with our deliverance team for prayer – in some churches they call it freedom prayer. You can do this by either speaking to one of the pastors and we will set something up.

We are going to end our time today around the communion table...

COMMUNION

Communion is a times to remind us of the power of Jesus to conquer sin and death – and there is no power greater than Him! Amen?!

We thought it would be nice to read a scripture together to prepare our hearts for this time. I know it’s not hugely popular anymore, to read scripture together as a congregation, but I think it’s so good for us! So I would like us to read Romans 8 together. I think it wraps up this message so well, and prepares us for communion. Come on church, let’s read this together...

ROMANS 8:31-39

What then... shall we say in response... to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also... along with him... graciously give us all things?

³³ Who will bring any charge... against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God... and is also interceding for us.

³⁵ Who shall separate us... from the love of Christ? Shall trouble... or hardship... or persecution... or famine... or nakedness... or danger... or sword? ³⁶ As it is written: “For your sake... we face death all day long... we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”

³⁷ No, in all these things... we are more than conquerors... through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced... that neither death nor life... neither angels nor demons... neither the present... nor the future... nor any powers (x2), ³⁹ neither height nor depth... nor anything else in all creation... will be able to separate us... from the love of God... that is in Christ Jesus... our Lord.

SERVE COMMUNION - EAT & DRINK TOGETHER

PRAY FOR SICK - Carol Mestern, Fay Fowler, Sandra Louw, Clarence Rubaine, Jo Gordon and Michael Losper.

CALL PASTOR ALAN & SANDY UP – Share his situation. Call the Overseers up, and have the whole church pray for him.