

February 25, 2007
 Learning To Discern Which Spirit Is Speaking
 Romans 8:28-34 / Ephesians 6:10-18 / I John 4:1-6 / Job 25:1-26:14

Since this is "Missions Weekend," here at our church, I thought I would begin my message by weaving in a story about a missionary — an unknown missionary personality who was actually one of the most instrumental people in spearheading the modern missions movement, even though he died without ever knowing it!

Most missiologists in the past (I believe) have wrongly pinpointed William Carey as "The Father of Modern Day Missions," when he set off for India in 1792.

And I say wrongly pinpoint Carey, because the modern missions movement (in my opinion) dates back much further than that, to John Elliot and Thomas Mayhew who were doing mission outreach to the Indians by 1646 / had translated the Bible into the Algonquian dialect in 1663 and evangelized almost all the Indians on Martha's Vineyard, Nantucket and Chappaquiddick by 1675.

Not to mention Eleazar Wheelock who started Dartmouth College for the express purpose of training his Indian converts for the Christian ministry in 1769.

And if there is anyone who deserves the title "Father of Modern Day Missions" it would be Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf and the Moravians. As the result of a Pentecost Type Outpouring of the Spirit that took place on the Estate of Count Zinzendorf, in Germany, on Wednesday, August 13, 1727 they started a round the clock prayer vigil for missions that lasted 100 years!

Convinced from Leviticus that "the sacred flame on the altar was never to go out" (which they interpreted to be prayer) 24 men and 24 women covenanted together to pray at a specifically scheduled time, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week — a commitment that lasted for 100 years!

The longest, continuous, unbroken prayer vigil in the history of the world!

But that's not all they did as a result of that event. They also covenanted together to send 10% of the members of their congregation overseas as missionaries, and over the next 25 years sent out 100 missionaries from that one little community to England, Scotland, Russia, the West Indies, North and South America, Greenland, Labrador, and South Africa — long before William Carey ever left for India!

“Foreign missions,” says Moravian scholar John Greenfield, “constitutes our richest heritage and our most glorious and abiding fruit.”

Yet, there’s one other person I want to focus on as well—a man named David Brainerd — the man whom my son David is named after. And I’d like to focus on him, not only because he was the man whose diary (published after his death from tuberculosis in 1742 at the age of 29) was instrumental in inspiring and challenging William Carey to go into foreign missions in the first place / but also because his life illustrates so well the point brought out in our passage for this morning from Job.

As we saw last week: Bildad looks at the Grandeur of God and His incomparable “light” (or holiness) which by way of contrast exposes the relative insignificance and sinfulness of man, and therefore (by logical deduction) suggest that man must therefore be little more than a maggot, or a worm, by comparison.

It was a notion I tried to counter last week by looking at Genesis 1:26-27 where Scripture explicitly declares that MANKIND ALONE is created in the image of God.

By also looking at Psalm 8:4-5, where David reminds us of the honor and dignity bestowed upon by the fact that we were made only “a little lower than God,” or as the GNB translates it, “Inferior only to God Himself.”

And by looking at the Gospel, which declares God’s love for humankind — even the most sinful of us — all of which counter the notion Bildad puts forth — that we are but mere maggots and worms to God.

Yet due to time limitations, I was unable to get into Chapter 26:1-4 where Job responds to what Bildad says. And I didn’t want to skip that because what we need to see is the righteous anger that Bildad’s statement arouses in Job and what it has to tell us!

So open your Bibles to chapter 26 verse 1 where Job rebukes Bildad for having the audacity to say what he does: “How you have helped the powerless!” he says. And in the context, what he means is: “How your statement about us being worms and maggots helps those who already feel like worms and maggots and are all too well aware that they are powerless to end their suffering!”
 “How you have saved the arm that is feeble!” (v. 2b)

(The verbal word picture being that the struggling or feeble person is lifting up their arm to have someone grab hold of it and pull them up, but instead find Bildad swatting it down with his hope-killing comments. Because maggots and worms are not things we squish and recoil from, not reach down to help!)

You see, Job knows what spiritual exhortation is supposed to do:

Not make despairing people despair all the more, but give them strength! Edify them! Build them up! Give them hope and helpful instruction! Encourage them and impart to them some small portion of the power that should be conveyed to people when a message from God is spoken to them!

Job appears to know what Paul tells us in I Cor. 14:3-4 — that the purpose of prophesy or spiritual instruction is to strengthen, encourage, comfort and edify the people of God — not make them want to give up or feel that their situation is even more hopeless than they initially thought!

And Job's anger is aroused, because all Bildad does (as he claims to be speaking for God) is make struggling people feel worse about themselves, or their situation, than they already do!

He makes people in pain feel even more insignificant, and powerless, and feeble, and hopeless, and cursed, and useless, and ashamed, and worthless than they already do, by telling despairing believers they're basically nothing but maggots and worms to God. How that helps the powerless! Job says, and saves the arm that is feeble!

And then, with another pointed rebuke, Job asks Bildad two of the most revealing of questions. In verse 4 he says: *"Who has helped you utter these words? And whose spirit spoke from your mouth?"*

And what are the obvious responses Job expects to his rhetorical questions? It wasn't GOD who helped you utter these words! And it wasn't HIS SPIRIT that spoke from your mouth! God would NEVER say that of believers He created in His image, and recreated by His grace for the purpose of restoring that image, and with it, the sense of honor and dignity that comes with it. The sense Job gives us is that it couldn't possibly have been God, or His Spirit that was speaking, because what Bildad has said is just plain evil!

Whose "spirit" was it then? Satan's spirit — the one hovering in the shadows and standing behind every scene and every dialogue in the Book of Job. He seems to disappear off the scene after chapter 2, but don't think he's gone!

He's never gone! He's the "prince of the power of the air." And as Job suggests today, it is Satan's spirit that has helped Bildad utter these words — his spirit and not God's that has spoken using his mouth.

You see, that's Satan's purpose in the life of a believer — if he can't destroy you (because God won't allow him to, as was the case with Job) then he'll do his best to discourage you! Because a discouraged, struggling, overwhelmed Christian that succumbs to feeling like they ARE little more than a maggot or a worm, becomes pretty ineffective in their service for Christ.

Satan doesn't have to defeat the armies of God, he merely needs to get us to believe his lies — like the lie that we are so insignificant to God that He couldn't possibly even notice us, never mind care about us / that we don't have what it takes / that we'll never be anything or do anything with our lives — that we're merely like disgusting little like maggots and worms — insects that are lower than dirt, or parasites that feed off dead things.

That's Satan's ploy — to further discourage the discouraged saint! To chip away at their faith and hope. To make struggling believers "FEEL" (as my old friend George Cournoyer used to say) like they are "lower than whale dung, and you don't get much lower than that!" It was one of the many ways Satan tried to immobilize that illustrious missionary David Brainerd. Listen to what Brainerd writes in his diary, and see if you might not have wrestled in a similar way on occasion.

Tuesday April 12, 1743: "Was greatly oppressed with grief and shame, reflecting on my past conduct [he was thrown out of Yale]... I was ashamed to think that such a wretch as I had ever preached. Longed to be excused from that work...."

And the **very next day** he writes:

"My heart was overwhelmed within me; verily I thought I was the meanest, vilest, most helpless, guilty, ignorant, benighted creature living. I knew what God had done for my soul... [yet] I was assaulted with dampening doubts and fears, whether it was even possible for such a wretch as I to be in a state of grace."

You see, one of the devices Satan uses to keep people from Christ, or to keep those in Christ from believing Christ could ever love them (or even want to associate with them) is to take their knowledge of their "unworthiness" (which is true), and get them to turn it into a sense of "worthlessness" (was is untrue), and then bombard them with thoughts of the latter. (Remember, Satan is more effective in leading us astray by twisting and distorting truth than by telling outright lies!)

The Puritan Thomas Brooks, in his book "Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices" wrote: "Ah!" says Satan. As you are worthy of the greatest misery, so you are unworthy of the least crumb of mercy. Do you think, says Satan, that Christ would ever own, receive, or embrace you, unworthy wretch that you are? No!... You are unworthy to even entertain Christ in your house, how much more unworthy you are to entertain Christ in your heart." He would never reside in you!

And Satan's purpose in doing so with the **UNBELIEVER** is to keep him from Christ altogether! Because he knows that unbelievers by nature think they must somehow make themselves "worthy" of God's favor. So Satan's ploy is to say:

"GOD WOULD NEVER RECEIVE SOMEONE LIKE YOU! YOU'RE TOO VILE, STAINED, POLLUTED AND WORTHLESS TO CALL FORTH ANYTHING BUT HIS DISGUST. YOU COULD NEVER RECEIVE HIS GRACE, ACCEPTANCE, PARDON, OR THE HONOR OF HIS INDWELLING PRESENCE. HE'D RATHER SQUISH YOU LIKE A WORM."

And his purpose in doing so with the **BELIEVER** is to so demoralize them, and make them feel like such miserable failures as Christians — so utterly worthless and unlovable that they either become ineffective for God, or quit serving God altogether.

Did you notice that? After being overwhelmed with a sense of grief and shame for past failures, Brainerd said, "*I was ashamed to think that such a wretch as I had ever preached. Longed to be released from that work.*" Precisely! **That's exactly what Satan wanted!** In fact, he felt so worthless, he not only thought he should stop serving God, he thought it impossible that he could even be a Christian at all!

That's one of Satan's devices. "HYPOCRITE!" chides Satan. "LOSER!" he says. YOU'RE NOT JUST USELESS, YOU'RE A LIABILITY! UNLIKE THOSE WHOM GOD USES TO DRAW PEOPLE TO CHRIST, YOU TURN PEOPLE AWAY! YOU COULDN'T BE A MORE WORTHLESS IF YOU TRIED! YOU'RE A WORM, says Satan, A REPULSIVE LITTLE MAGGOT!"

And **YES**, it is true that our sin does make us unworthy, as Thomas Brooks goes on to point out. In the economy of grace there is no such thing as ever being "worthy" to saved! But that doesn't mean that as people formed in His image, we, and our salvation, and the restoration of His image in us is meaningless or irrelevant to God!

Thus, I ask you: Who was speaking in David Brainerd's thoughts? What "spirit" was flooding his heart and mind with such self-loathing, self-condemning, discouraging, un-gospel-like thoughts? You know! It's rather obvious.

And likewise, when YOU have such thoughts pop into your head, where do you think they came from? Who do you think spoke them into your thoughts, and tried to affix them like a computer virus to your emotions and affections? It should be just as obvious!

In the Gospel GOD says to the WEARY and those BURDENED WITH GUILT: "Come, and I will give you rest." He does NOT say: "You shameful, wretched, guilty, ignorant, benighted worm-like creature!" Though that's exactly what Brainerd heard a voice say in his thoughts, and felt in his heart.

And you know what's interesting about Brainerd's experience? Those thoughts started bombarding him just a two days after he had preached a sermon through which three Indians were touched by the Holy Spirit, and one Indian woman had testified, "Her heart had cried ever since she first heard him preach." (Cried in the GOOD SENSE of seeing her sin and Christ's love for her demonstrated on the cross.) It was a cycle that happened frequently. Used by God / accused by Satan. Used by God / reviled by Satan. Up and down, and up and down!

And it's true, it was, most likely due in some part, to his loneliness and the severity of his conditions. "Haven't seen an Englishman for the entire month," he wrote in one spot. He was also caught in snow storms and slept shivering in shelters made of little more than pine branches / ate a constant diet of hasty pudding, boiled corn, and bread baked in ashes with only an occasional piece of meat / and slept on a boards with little heaps of straw on them, in a little musty one room log cabin with nothing but a dirt floor. That can take its toll on the physical, emotional and spiritual health of even the most stalwart saint!

Yet after two years of toiling and preaching and praying and sacrifice among the Indians, the fire of God fell, and revival broke out among them!

Saturday July 29, 1745: "Preached twice to the Indians, and could not but wonder at their seriousness, and the strictness of their attention—blessed be God who has inclined their hearts to hear. And how refreshing it is to me to see them attend with such uncommon diligence and affection, with tears in their eyes and concern in their hearts!... I could only lift up my heart to God, blessed be His name... O How much better than life is the presence of God!"

August 6, 1745: "I discoursed with the Indians at the house where I lodged. Many of them were much affected, and appeared surprisingly tender; so that a few words about the concerns of their souls would cause the tears to flow freely, and produce many groans... Divine truths were attended with a surprising influence, and profound concern among them. There were scarcely three in forty who could refrain from tears and bitter cries. They all as one seemed in agony of soul to obtain an interest in Christ; and the more I discoursed on the love and compassion of God in sending His Son to suffer for the sins of men, and the more I invited them to come and partake of His love, the more their distress was aggravated, because they felt themselves unable to come. It was surprising to see how their hearts seemed to be pierced with the tender and melting invitations of the gospel, when there was not a word of terror spoken to them...I asked what they wanted God to do for them? 'That Christ should wipe their hearts quite clean,' they replied."

Think what would a blessing he and others would have missed if he'd listened to the lies of Satan and stopped preaching as he'd been tempted to do.

So what should you do when such thoughts start to creep into your mind, and Satan seeks to overwhelm and immobilize you with them? FIVE quick things:

FIRST, you should reject them immediately! Don't even entertain them for a second, lest you believe him, and disbelieve the Gospel, and thereby give a foothold to the devil, thus allowing his poison to infect your soul with a venom that is hard to extract once it begins to spread.

SECOND, you may even have to fight with all your might to keep yourself from wanting to believe them when you've done something terribly wrong, or something that hurt or did damage to someone else. Yet know this: Berating yourself with self-loathing and self-condemning thoughts serves no good purpose whatsoever, even if you've done the worst of things. There is no redemptive value whatsoever in self-loathing! To do so is to heap guilt upon the conscience, and as Walter Marshall once wrote, "Heaping guilt upon the conscience only makes us more weak and prone to fall into other sins. A guilty conscience strongly maintains and increases the dominion of sin and Satan in us."

THIRD, know that Satan's purpose is to discourage and defeat you. He hates you and such thoughts are expressions of his hatred, for they will only depress you and make you weak, and cause you to entertain thoughts of giving up on the Christian life, or giving up on life itself. And there is nothing Satan desires more than your personal or spiritual destruction. Yet, if he can't get you to destroy yourself, he will settle for getting you to loathe yourself, for then your usefulness to God, yourself and others will be almost as good as if you were dead.

FOUTH, learn to recognize the Shepherds voice. Jesus says, "My Sheep know me and they listen to my voice." Yet if more Christians simply knew Christ's voice, they would know exactly who is speaking when they hear in their minds: "You Jerk. How could you. You fool! Your worthless. How could God love a failure like you? Look at all the things you've done, all the mistakes you've made, all the people you've hurt. You're worse than useless. You've ruined everything I ever gave you to do." If Christians merely knew their Shepherds voice better, they'd know that such thoughts come directly from the pit of hell. They are the voice of Satan himself speaking his native language!

David Wilkerson tells of one occasion early in his ministry when he was struggling with a burden too heavy to bear, and so he went to God in prayer, but as he says "The heavens were brass."

Then he writes, "Suddenly a blackness I dare not even try to describe came over me. It was as though the angel of death was breathing down the back of my neck. "Stand up," a still small voice commanded. Then came a torrent of accusations: "You're only in it for the fame... You're a fake. Your wife will lose her mind and the baby. God will judge you for a heart full of pride." I fell on my knees quaking and shaking. "No, God!" I screamed. "It's not true...I love you...I've given all...you can't possibly think so bad of me..." Then a ray of light came through in the form of a Scripture verse: "Try the spirits to see if they are of God." Another verse came to mind: "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father." I stood to my feet, looked up and prayed: "God I don't believe these lies, but even if they are true, you are my advocate Jesus, forgive me." The voice began to curse, and I knew it was the accuser of the brethren — Satan. I began to laugh, the load began to lift, and the darkness vanished."

At first he thought it was God speaking (after all it was a "still small voice") until he thought about what was said, and he realized God didn't talk that way to His children! So he called them what they were — lies! And he laughed, because he also realized that Satan (who frequently comes to us as an angel of light) had almost put one over on him!

Then **LAST**, we must remember that just as Satan is the "Accuser of the Brethren," "The Deceiver" and "The Father of Lies," so also Christ is the "Lover of our Souls," our "Anchor," "Rock" and "High Tower into which we run for shelter." He is the one who will "never forsake us, and never let us go," or "turn us away" no matter how many times we fail Him.

His arms are always open wide, His voice always says, "Come," and He will never condemn us for He took our condemnation upon Himself! Even when we go astray he will leave the ninety-nine to come get us and bring us back, when we confess He will always forgive, and He is never ashamed to say we are His.

Unlike Satan, when God speaks in our thoughts He says things like: My child, My beloved, My cherished one, My joy and My delight, Come to Me, Return to Me, I chose you, I Love you, I will never let you go. You are precious and honored in my sight.

Is that the voice YOU hear? And if it's not, then what voice have you been listening to? And what do you need to DO next time you hear it speak?!