

1. The Unseen Realm

If God is For Us Who Can be Against Us? (Romans 8:31)

To introduce our topic, I would like to start with one of my fishing stories from my younger days as a commercial fisherman outside the east coast port of Harwich, Essex, England. The first sign that I knew something was wrong was when I glanced down at the water rushing past our fishing trawler in the wrong direction! The net that my father and I were towing along the bottom of the seabed had caught on something heavy, something on the bottom of the seabed. We put our winches in gear and slowly pulled the boat back against the tide toward the object that was stuck in our net. Inch by inch, we heaved the net with our two-ton winch straining at the weight. Our fishing boat, the *Why Worry*, leaned heavily over as she creaked and groaned, the derrick and mast taking the strain. When the net had been pulled to the surface, there nestling squarely in the Cod End, was the biggest of the Second World War German Magnetic mines, a whopping 12 foot long mine still in gleaming pristine condition with 1500 pounds of high explosive. Designed to blow ships completely in half by the upward blast, it was now swinging to and fro just inches above our deck as the waves were making us roll.

With a heavy clunk we rested the mine on the deck. Made of stainless steel, it looked as if it had just been laid there on the bottom of the seabed near my homeport of Harwich. It had been buried beneath the mud in a very familiar piece of fishing ground, a place we had fished again and again. The chains at the front of the net must have just caught it perfectly, dislodging it from its resting place, pulling it straight out of the mud. Once we cut the mine out of our net we then had to get it over the side again without incident, a delicate task, considering that it was still in such good condition and that it was possible that it could still explode. Fishermen had heard of such things happening, boats just disappearing, not accounted for.

With the whole boat leaning over, we gently lowered it back into the sea and carefully cut through the rope strop, releasing it from our boat. Then to our amazement, the mine stood up in the water, the top part of it still showing! We had not realized how shallow the water was and how little water was under our boat where we let it go. We called the Coastguard to come and detonate the mine, so that it would not be a danger to any other boats. On the next high tide, they put it on a long rope and towed it out to deeper water and blew it up. We heard later that when the tide had gone out, at the low water point, people were walking on the secluded beach and wondering what this 12-foot monstrosity was that was standing up on the beach at low tide!

Seeing Beyond the Physical Realm

Like trawling a net in waters where two world wars have been fought, there are some things in life that can be unseen but deadly. Just because you may be unaware of something dangerous, it doesn't mean it cannot affect you. Electricity in a light plug is unseen, but stick your fingers in a live socket, and you will soon realize that there are powerful things that are unseen but dangerous. Natural gas is odorless and unseen, and if there is a lot of it in your house, it can totally destroy your home. The gas companies add a horrible smell to it so that, when we have a leak, we'll smell it.

The unexploded mine brought the truth home to me that just as we had gone over that familiar fishing ground again and again with no mishap, there are some things in life that one cannot see, but which can affect our lives in ways that we don't realize. The Bible is very clear throughout that there is more to this world than what is seen with the naked eye. There is a spiritual realm that is just as real as the world in which we live in. I believe it to be more real than what is seen. This world is just temporary and passing, a shadow of things to come. There are things that are unseen that are happening around us all the time, which are of a spiritual nature, and which have eternal value.

In the Old Testament book of 2 Kings, there is a story of a king reigning in Aram who was angry because his actions and intentions were somehow being made known to the armies of Israel. He could not understand how Israel knew everything he was doing and anything he plotted (2 Kings 6:8-10). He thought that he had a spy amongst his leaders. His problem was that Israel had a man of God, Elisha, who lived his life in such a way that he was able, by the Spirit of God, to know the very words that the King of Aram spoke in secret to his generals (2 Kings 6:11-12). God was revealing these things to Elisha, who was very aware of the unseen realms, and who had an intimate and powerful prayer life, which gave him this special insight. When the King of Aram found out about Elisha's gift, he was so enraged that he sent his army to the town where Elisha lived, hoping to kill or capture him.

¹⁴Then he sent horses and chariots and a strong force there. They went by night and surrounded the city. ¹⁵When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. "Oh, my lord, what shall we do?" the servant asked. ¹⁶"Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them" ¹⁷And Elisha prayed, "O LORD, open his eyes so he may see." **Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.** ¹⁸As the enemy came down toward him, Elisha prayed to the LORD, "Strike these people with blindness." So he struck them with blindness, as Elisha had asked (2 Kings 6:14-18).

When Elisha's servant looked at the size of the army of Aram surrounding the city, he began to lose heart. Things looked hopeless when seen only from an earthly perspective. However, all was not as it seemed. There were spiritual forces of God around Elisha and Gehazi, his servant, which the young novice to the things of God was unaware. Elisha prayed for his servant's eyes to be opened to the unseen spiritual realm around them. All of a sudden, at the prayer of Elisha, he saw beyond this physical world to the reality of the spiritual forces of God that were previously hidden from him, and he saw angelic beings of God that were much more powerful than the army of Aram. He saw the armies of heaven protecting and surrounding the prophet of God, available to serve him in whatever way the prophet prayed. The enemies of Israel were defeated with one display of God's power at the prayer of Elisha. We too, as servants of the Living God, have angelic hosts that protect us.

Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation? (Hebrews 1:14).

How much do we use or value heavenly help when we are in need? The Word of God is very clear that angels are sent by God to serve us even before we come to faith in Christ and, of course, afterwards, too. Notice that the Scripture is written in the future tense. Angels are sent to help and protect those who *will inherit salvation*. That means that God is working ahead of time on the behalf of those who make the choice to follow Him. In fact, even when we are babies, Scripture indicates that we have an unseen protector, an angel that watches over us:

See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven (Matthew 18:10).

We do not reach out to the angels in prayer for their help. No, our prayer is directed to the Father in whom we place our trust. Angelic beings take their direction and orders from the Father. It is faith in God that connects us to this unseen realm, just as it is faith that opened the servant's eyes and faith that caused Elisha to reach out to God in prayer. I believe that every one of us who are Christians has an angel watching over us (Acts 12:15), sent to serve the heirs of salvation (Hebrews 1:14).

Question 1. Have you ever had that feeling that something invisible was protecting you through something that you experienced? Talk to one another and share any stories that you may have.

Many Christians are just like Elisha's servant, unaware of God's power and supernatural resources. The majority of Christians in the West have no room for the supernatural. For the most part, we are oblivious to angelic beings and demonic spirits in the unseen realm. How many times do we miss seeing God's power displayed and Satan's kingdom displaced because we do not reach out to God in prayer and believe Him for His divine resources and intervention? Although God is sovereign and all-powerful, He chooses to act in partnership with His people through prayer and faith in God.

Before he came to Christ, Brian Gough, an old friend of mine from Harwich in Essex, England, used to be involved in spiritual things of an occult nature. He was ignorant to the dangers that he was inviting into his home. His family began to hear voices and see spirits in their home after playing a few times with an Ouija board. His children became accustomed to seeing disembodied spirits who deceived them into thinking they were spirit guides. The family knew the spirits by name. They were deceived into believing that "white magic" was harmless until one night all hell broke loose, and demons started to manifest to them. They were frightened and realized that they were involved with something very dark and not at all harmless. The things they saw and heard in their home horrified all of them.

This went on all day until Brian looked up the address of the local evangelical church pastor, Harry Hughes, and started walking to his house for help. On the way, he heard audible voices telling him, "If you go to his house, we will kill you all." Concerned for the safety of his family, Brian ignored the threatening voices and went and saw Harry Hughes. Harry came and cleansed his house, praying and taking authority over every evil spirit in the house and removing every occult token there. He then led the family in prayers of repentance and renouncing every evil hold that dark evil spirits had on his family. They finished their time of prayer by dedicating their home to the worship of God and His Word. When Brian and his family committed their lives to

Christ and repented, renounced and forsook all involvement in the occult, their lives were completely renewed. No demonic activity occurred in their house from that moment on.

Question 2. Have you ever had a supernatural experience where you sensed great evil? How did you respond?

How Does the Unseen Realm Affect Us?

God has given us protection. In a later session, we will talk about the armor of God, given to Christians for their protection against the warfare of the enemy, but for now let's talk about the natural "fence or hedge" (Job 1:10), the barrier that keeps the enemy from making inroads into peoples lives.

⁶One day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them. ⁷The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the LORD, "From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it." ⁸Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil." ⁹"Does Job fear God for nothing?" Satan replied. ¹⁰**Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has?** You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. ¹¹But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face." ¹²The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger" (Job 1:6-12 Emphasis mine).

In Job's case, Satan wanted to destroy his testimony of God's faithfulness, and for reasons we are not told, God allowed the hedge of protection to be removed and gave permission for Satan to attack Job. The enemy strategizes as to how he can break down that natural barrier that protects our soul from fear, bondage, and servitude to demonic forces. When we play around with the occult, for instance, this "hedge" is gradually eroded or cut back, and one can see and experience things that are not normally seen.

The enemy, Satan, gives occult power to those who are obedient to his whim. Occult power can be attractive to those seeking such things, but it never comes without a price. Every form of occult power comes with a hook in it, ensnaring one to satanic bondage. When ground is given to the enemy to do his will, oppression and darkness are always the result. Drugs are another means of eroding that barrier so that one can experience alternate states of reality.

Satan never gives away such experiences without bringing those who are searching in the darkness closer to him. God, by His Spirit, also enables His people to move in supernatural power if we are open to be used of Him, but when God moves His people to act under His power, there is never a hook. It brings joy to the heart to be useful for God. Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is always liberty and freedom (2 Corinthians 3:17), unlike the enemy.

Chip Ingram, author of a book called *“The Invisible War,”* states, “There is a visible and an invisible world that intersect, and we live in that intersection.”¹ Sometimes, when people are sick, they may see things in the unseen realm. Often when a person is dying, there are accounts of people and things that they see on the other side.

Question 3. Have you ever been by the bedside of a loved one that saw something in the unseen realm, or have you heard a story of someone who saw something supernatural?

Svetlana Stalin, the daughter of Josef Stalin, the evil leader of Russia from 1922-1953, accompanied her father at death’s door and said that she would never again sit alongside an unbeliever who was dying. She said that he went into hell kicking and screaming. Voltaire was said to have died crying out in torment. Speaking for those who do know God, C.M. Ward said, “No Christian has ever been known to recant on his death bed.”

Paul the Apostle saw and experienced a number of supernatural occurrences as he walked as a Spirit-led believer in Christ. One such experience he tells us about.

¹I must go on boasting. Although there is nothing to be gained, I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. ²I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. ³And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows— ⁴was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell (2 Corinthians 12:1-4).

Paul is talking about something that he himself witnessed. He declares that he doesn’t even know if he was in his body at the time when he was caught up to the third heaven or Paradise. Genesis 1:1 says that, in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Notice that the word *heavens* is in the plural. This obviously raises a big question: If the abode of God is in the third heaven, where are the first and second heavens? What goes on there?

I personally do not believe that the third heaven is in some distant galaxy. It is not a physical place such as earth. Some say that the first heaven is the physical heavens of the galaxies, stars and planets, and that the second heaven is the spiritual unseen world that intersects with our planet. There is no way of proving this point purely from Scripture. However, what is clear is that there is an unseen realm that is beyond the five physical senses. Call it what you like, the first or second heaven. I think it is sufficient to understand it as a different dimension of space-time, where, if God were to open our spiritual eyes, like the servant of Elisha, we would see powerful angelic beings, but also, perhaps, evil demonic powers that are seeking to influence us humans to do their bidding.

In another place, Paul the apostle wrote to the church at Ephesus, warning of a spirit who he calls the prince of the power of the air.

¹ Chip Ingram, *The Invisible War*, Published by Baker Books, Grand Rapids MI. Page 39.

"And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the **prince of the power of the air**, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience" (Ephesians 2:1-2).

Who is the *prince of the power of the air*? Why do you think he is called this? We can logically assume that Paul is talking about the unseen world from where Satan is doing his work of deceiving man. Satan is the one referred to as a spirit with the rank of a prince inhabiting a spiritual dimension of power in "the air," an atmosphere or realm in which he is active. In another place, Jesus Himself calls him, "**the ruler of this world**" (John 12:31), and the apostle John tells us that the physical world in which we live is under satanic control: "**We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one**" (1John 5:19). Some believe that Satan inhabits a place called hell, but this is not correct according to the Bible. Revelation 12:7-13 tells us of a time that I believe is yet future where there will be a war in the heavenly realms, which Satan will lose and be cast onto Earth:

⁷Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. ⁸But he was not strong enough, and they **lost their place in heaven**. ⁹The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him ¹⁰ Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For **the accuser of our brothers and sisters**, who accuses them **before our God** day and night, has been hurled down (Revelation 12:7-10).

The context of the passage indicates that he has been accusing us before God up until this point, which tallies with the passage in Job, which we read earlier. This spiritual realm is the venue of a spiritual battle between God's angelic beings and Satan's demons and princes. The battle is for supremacy over the Earth and over each individual person that is born on the planet. There is a war going on for your very soul. Satan wants to keep us in the dark as to his work in trying to destroy your life. He would rather that we be ignorant that there is such a battle occurring. His work goes unhindered if man is unaware of his schemes. He, therefore, seeks to keep you oblivious to the fact that there is a spiritual realm, a heaven and a hell.

The English author, C.S. Lewis, wrote a book entitled, "*The Screwtape Letters*." It is fictional in format, focusing on Christian theological issues, primarily those to do with temptation and resistance to it. In this imaginative book, Lewis writes in the first person as a senior demon named Screwtape, who has been given the task of training a junior demon named Wormwood to keep men and women from finding Christ. If they do find Christ, then the trainee demon's task is to hinder the Christian's ability to make any difference with their lives in terms of affecting Satan's kingdom. In the preface of his book, Lewis explains his thesis, saying:

There are two equal and opposite errors into which people can fall about the demons. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and

unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors, and hail a materialist and a magician with the same delight.²

On page thirty-one, as the demon Uncle Screwtape, writing to the junior demon Wormwood, he writes,

I wonder you should ask me whether it is essential to keep the patient (the person that the demon is seeking to destroy) in ignorance of your own existence. That question, at least for the present phase of the struggle, has been answered by the high command. Our policy, for the moment, is to conceal ourselves. Of course this has not always been so. We are really faced with a cruel dilemma. When people disbelieve in our existence, we lose all the pleasing results of direct terrorism and we make no magicians. On the other hand, when they believe in us, we cannot make them materialists and skeptics...I do not think that you will have much difficulty in keeping the patient in the dark. The fact that "devils" are predominantly comic figures in the modern imagination will help you. If any faint suspicion of your existence begins to arise in his mind, suggest to him a picture of something in red tights, and persuade him that since he cannot believe in that (it is an old textbook method of confusing them) he therefore cannot believe in you.³

For those who are not believers, Satan would seek by all means possible to keep them from receiving and ultimately responding to God's Word by believing the gospel. For those of us who are Christians, Satan seeks to keep us blind to the fact of having received God's power and authority to overcome all the power of the enemy (Mark 16:17-18). Scripture calls Satan the god of this age.

The **god of this age** has **blinded the minds of unbelievers**, so that **they cannot see** the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God (2 Corinthians 4:4).

Satan has many strategies of trying to keep you blinded to the gospel and to the working of God's power in you and through you to impact this world. We choose by our actions to whom we listen and obey, Satan or the Lord. If we continue to listen to Satan's voice, with his doubts and unbelief, we will not live fruitful lives for God on this Earth.

Question 4. What methods does Satan use today to blind the minds of unbelievers? Has he used any of these strategies in your life at any time?

God's Protection for His people

The Unseen Realm is also a place where God's angels are at work. Balaam was a man who had an ability to move in the spiritual realm and place a curse on people. When the Israelite people were travelling from Egypt to the land that God had given them, they had to pass through the country of Moab, whose king was Balak. He was afraid he would lose any battle against Israel due to the Israelites easy victory over the Amorites. He felt like he needed some help to overcome Israel, so he sent for Balaam, the seer, to curse Israel so that he could overcome them.

² *The Screwtape Letters* by C.S. Lewis, Published by HarperSanFrancisco, Zondervan Publishing House. Page IX

³ *Ibid*, Page 31.

God told Balaam not to go at first, but Balaam would not hear the word *no*, and he pleaded until God said go, with the restriction that he was only to speak what God would give him. On the way, though, his heart began again to think of the promise of great reward and how he could get it (2 Peter 2:15). In God's protection of His people, He sent an angel to cut off Balaam's head. I know it is a weird passage of Scripture, but is it really hard to believe that God, the creator of the universe, can allow an animal to speak back to his master as he is hitting him? When the donkey sees the danger of the angel ahead on the path he tries to steer Balaam away crushing his foot in the process. Balaam cannot see the angel and has already beaten his donkey twice by the time we enter the story:

²⁶Then the angel of the LORD moved on ahead and stood in a narrow place where there was no room to turn, either to the right or to the left. ²⁷When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, she lay down under Balaam, and he was angry and beat her with his staff. ²⁸Then the LORD opened the donkey's mouth, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you to make you beat me these three times?" ²⁹Balaam answered the donkey, "You have made a fool of me! If I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you right now." ³⁰The donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your own donkey, which you have always ridden, to this day? Have I been in the habit of doing this to you?" "No," he said. ³¹**Then the LORD opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the angel of the LORD** standing in the road with his sword drawn. So he bowed low and fell facedown (Numbers 22:26-31).

Balaam was oblivious to what his donkey was doing in saving his life. God opened up the donkey's mouth to show Balaam how his heart was becoming full of greed and the Lord would not allow His people to be cursed. If he was going to continue in his heart to give in to a spirit of greed, the Lord was ready to give His angel permission to cut off his head. Often, like Balaam, we go headlong into situations in ministry or work where there are unseen spiritual forces at work, and if we are not sensitive spiritually to God, demonic forces can influence us (Matthew 16:23). How merciful the Lord was to speak to Balaam through his donkey. Wouldn't you like to have been a fly on that wall watching the spectacle of Balaam having an angry conversation with his donkey!

This is another example of something happening in the unseen realm of which humans (Balaam) were completely unaware. It is interesting to note that the donkey was more aware of the unseen realm than Balaam was. I'm sure all of us who have a dog or a cat have noticed the animal looking around the room looking at something that is unseen. Animals have been known to sense a spiritual presence. It is very possible that they are looking at angels that continually watch over us that are walking with the Lord.

⁷The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them (Psalm 34:7).

Those of us who are born again of God's Spirit are told that God's incomparable great power is available for us to use under God's direction and guidance (Ephesians 1:17-19). Why do we not see more of God's power working in the people of God? The Book of James tells us, "**You do not have, because you do not ask God**" (James 4:2). God waits and longs for His church to move

in more of His power. This is what Satan fears more than anything—the church walking in dependence on the Father through prayer.

We need to have a heart that is sensitive to be moved and directed by God as we go about our daily lives. It is so easy to react to situations and beat our donkey rather than asking God as to what He is doing. We turn to blaming and shaming people instead of trying to understand if we are going through something of a spiritual nature. In these days where there is so much occult and demonic activity, we are to listen to the Father. Jesus said, “**Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from Him comes to me**” (John 6:45). It is possible, even in our noisy world, to listen to what the Father says and learn from Him. When God speaks to our hearts, it always aligns with His word. Jesus was our model in all things. He said,

I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; **he can do only what he sees his Father doing**, because whatever the Father does the Son also does (John 5:19).

Jesus modeled to us a life laid down to the Father, living in obedience to His will, and seeking to be a blessing to those around Him. That’s why He could say; “**Anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father**” (John 14:12). Our difficulty is in knowing and seeing what God is doing in us and around us. The more we can grow in our dependency on God and His Word and Spirit, the more we can overcome what the enemy is seeking to do in our lives, our families, and neighborhoods.

The enemy’s chief tactics against us is deception and temptation to sin. We must choose whose voice to which we will listen and obey, Satan’s or Christ’s. Our God has made it clear that we will have trouble and difficulty as we walk out our lives in spiritual warfare with an enemy that seeks to destroy us, but He has also reminded us that Satan is a defeated foe.

³³I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world (John 16:33).

Where was Satan defeated? At the cross of Christ! What Satan thought was his greatest victory in taking Christ to the cross was his greatest defeat. He who knew no sin *became sin* in our place (2 Corinthians 5:21). Christ’s substitutionary death on the cross was for us that we sinful human beings might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21). By our faith in Christ, we have entered into His victory over Satan. John the Apostle wrote, “**The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work**” (1 John 3:8). We that belong to Christ are no longer held in bondage to Satan and sin. We are delivered and set free from servitude to dark spiritual forces that are unseen. Paul the Apostle writes, “**For he [God] has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins**” (Colossians 1:13). There is an unseen world that intersects with this world, but we that belong to Christ are no longer under Satan’s dominion—Christ has overcome him at the Cross. What a triumph, what a Savior! “**I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades**” (Revelation 1:18). Let that soak into your spirit!

Prayer: Father, I pray that I may have a greater awareness of what you are doing on planet Earth. Let the way I view the world be according to the lens of Your Word and don't let me be influenced by unseen evil forces that seek my fall. Let Your kingdom come on Earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

Keith Thomas.

Email: keiththomas7@gmail.com

Facebook: groupbiblestudy.com

Website: www.groupbiblestudy.com