

**The Schemer Part 5 –
“What’s the Big Idea?”
Genesis 3:1 – 8; 2 Corinthians 10:3 – 5**

So to kick things off, what do think is the connection between these two passages this morning?

Tell the person next to you.

Here we have the account of our ancestors encounter with a serpent who is generally thought of as being the devil.

He comes to Eve but he doesn’t attack her as you might expect a serpent would. I mean the Devil didn’t attack her with a stick.

He didn’t try to stick his fangs in her.

He didn’t try to coil around her and to squeeze the life out of her.

So what did he do? He attacked Eve *with an idea*.

Satan by definition is a slanderer and a liar, one who twists the truth to so mislead us.

And ever since that first victory – when through Adam’s disobedience, chaos and sin and death entered our world – ever since then, the devil’s chief area of attack has been the minds of human beings.

He is intent on wrecking our lives and one of the ways he seeks to do that is to bring us into error about God, our world and ourselves.

All throughout history he has sown into the hearts and minds of people these big ideas, ideas that are affront to God.

Paul says these ideas become strongholds or fortresses.

These are arguments and arrogant claims that oppose the knowledge of God.

In Paul’s day it was Rome; that the Caesar was one of the gods who brought order and peace to the world. If only you would offer your worship to the emperor and confess him as Lord, you too could experience this peace and flourish.

But Christians couldn’t do that.

And this peace often came through the blood and death of its enemies.

These Big Ideas that set themselves up against the knowledge of God have not gone away.

Followers of Jesus in every age have to grapple and fight against them.

So what do you reckon,

“What are the Big Ideas at work in our world today?”

These are ideas, philosophies, these ideologies and world-views that oppose God.

Have a chat and see if you can name any?

Well, we have to talk in broad brush strokes – did you name any of these:

Communism – In the last century a quarter of the world’s population lived under communism.

Under communism private property is abolished and becomes owned by the state, all people are said to be equal and therefore being an individual is of less importance. Society is rigidly controlled and religion is forbidden.

Materialism – the only things that exist is what we can feel, smell, taste, hear and see with our five senses. Human beings are complex “machines”; personality is an interrelation of chemical and physical properties we do not yet fully understand. Death is extinction of personality and individuality.

Religious Pluralism – pluralism says that all faiths are valid.

No religion can declare itself more true or false, right or wrong than another. No one group is allowed to claim an exclusive hold on truth. No one faith has better insight, understanding or access to God than another.

To do this, so we are told, is to be dogmatic and intolerant.

Ethical or Moral Relativism – which says, there is no absolute right or wrong.

In Western society there is only a very small set of shared common values. What may be wrong for you is still absolutely okay for me.

Narcissism – It’s ego-centric self-absorption. It’s obsession with self.

Narcissism focuses one’s attention and commitment towards oneself, rather than to God.

These are the Big Ideas still alive in our world today.

And they are like fortresses.

They have a strong hold over people's minds and affect their lives.

They are in the air that we breathe.

They have taken root in our world, and just like trees, that bear fruit.

What was the fruit of communism in the last century?

100 million deaths, more than any war or any other time in human history. People were subjected to mock trials, starved, sent to labour camps, publicly executed, or simply disappeared in the night never to be seen again.

The Christian faith in particular was targeted. Churches were either burnt down or strictly governed by state control. Christians were tortured in an attempt to have them recant their faith.

Materialism cannot give meaning and purpose to life and wholeness to relationships. It cannot explain or create beautiful art and wonderful music.

Religious pluralism says that Jesus is just one among many. However for us He is one over all, full of beauty and grace.

But we know that religious pluralism has taken hold in our world when we are charged with intolerance for saying that God has made Himself known uniquely and decisively through Scripture and in Christ.

Ethical relativism is relegating moral decisions to the realm of opinion. The difficulty for those who follow Jesus is that we do follow a God who does say there is black and white, right and wrong, good and evil. The response of many people is to say, "Who are you to judge?" and being judgemental is one of the chief sins in a secular society.

Narcissism has created shallow people with little concern or empathy for others. It has been amplified by social media and the age of the selfie. You cannot truly follow Jesus *and* be a narcissist.

These are the Big Ideas we have to contend with.

In some way they bear the fingerprints of the enemy.

For many people the ideas that become strongholds come in form of loose little thoughts.

You know, we all have constant mental traffic. One thought after another. Someone said that mind is like a banana tree full on monkeys.

Most of that traffic is neutral – what should I have breakfast, what should I wear, where did I leave my keys?

Some of it is positive – it's a beautiful day , the preacher is amazing! 😊

But there are times, even seasons, where our mental traffic is of a negative bent, even for Christians.

These loose little thoughts are often the whispers of the enemy.
It can be suggestion, a single idea or a word.

When persistent they can paralyse you with inaction or steer you toward a wrong action.

These attacks, they are often very subtle before they grow to something more.
It can be in any area of life.

Nancy was a follower of Jesus who became convinced there was no God, no purpose, and no hope. She no longer saw a prospect for a happy and fulfilling future. All Nancy envisioned doing is enduring what is to come, or better still, finding a way to get out of the life business as soon as possible.

During her first session, Nancy spoke of abandoned relationships and shattered ambitions. Nothing she had dreamed of for her life had materialized.

Her present state of mind had begun three years before when she was employed by a large organization as a sales manager. Through diligence and hard work she had made her way up the ladder of promotion, past others older than she, and was soon competing very effectively in a field traditionally dominated by men.

At first she'd found her work satisfying. It has occupied most of her waking mind and given her a sense of fulfilment.

She has dated some, but had not met the right man yet. "There's still lots of time for this," she had reassured herself while she was ladder-climbing. Then things began to go wrong. She became restless and unhappy. Seeds of discontentment emerged. Her life, which was once a beautiful garden, was now growing weeds. Beauty gave way to ugliness.

So what went wrong with Nancy?

It all started when she picked up a Christian book on health, wealth and success. Central to the book was the idea that God wanted everyone to be wealthy and successful. Nancy swallowed this alluring half-truth; hook, line and sinker.

“Nancy became obsessed, with the idea that she wasn’t being as successful as she could be and that she deserved a better deal from life. She became profoundly dissatisfied with herself and her circumstances. She decided that she had settled for the clouds when the stars were her destiny.”

These were the things that Nancy said to herself about her life. Believing she was entitled to better, Nancy resigned her job. But better didn’t come. Within six months she was depressed and on the verge of bankruptcy.

So we’re counselled to take captive every thought – even loose little thoughts – and make them obedient to Christ.

Now remember, Christ isn’t just another name for Jesus, and it’s not His surname. Christ is a title: it means Messiah; it means King.

So when Paul says that we take captive every thought and make it obedient to Christ, he is saying we have a King – Jesus – and even our thought life is to be submitted to Him.

We resist the schemer when I mental traffic is given over to Christ.

So how do we demolish these strongholds and take captive our thoughts?

And I think that happens in three ways:

The first you’ll know the first one:

- *Scripture*

The word of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit as the supreme rule of faith and life and the supreme standard of the Church.

And in taking captive our thoughts there is one ancient practice, one activity that has been passed down from the beginning – the memorisation of Scripture.

In my early discipleship this was something drummed into me.

In the face of temptation, in tough times, you can draw on what you have memorized.

More than that it can shape your mental traffic. There were times when these verses kept my mind from going off the rails.

We take captive every thought submit to Jesus the King through Scripture.

- We've also been given the *Holy Spirit*, the Spirit of Holiness, the One who makes us whole and holy.

The Spirit shines a light on our mental traffic to expose those thoughts that need to be made captive to King Jesus.

He is able to gently but clearly put His finger on belief or idea that's running loose in our minds.

Then He empowers and enables us to take captive that thought.

So we need to cultivate and nurture our relationship with the Holy Spirit both personally and corporately.

We need an openness to what He wants to speak into our lives so that His voice can silence the whisper of the enemy.

- The third might surprise you: *Community*.

The Body of Christ, the temple of the Spirit, the People of God.

The community the faith is an area where our loose little thoughts and Big Ideas come under examination.

For me, as a pastor, one hardest areas is times when I have to say to people, "You know, what you're saying, what you have in mind, I don't think it's quite right."

But it's not meant to be just me.

Scripture speaks of teaching one another, even, and you won't like this, admonishing one another.¹

We hear what others are saying; we test what they say.

We do so with those we trust, who have our best intentions at heart.

So what's it for you this morning?

¹ Colossians 3:16 "Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom...."

