



## Sermon Transcript

### April 26, 2020

## God's One Story of Redemption

### The Power of Jesus

#### Matthew 11:1-6 and 12:22-30

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on April 26, 2020 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Dr. Scott W. Solberg. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio and video version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at [www.wethefc.com](http://www.wethefc.com).

**Sermon Text**  
**Matthew 11:1-6**

<sup>1</sup> When Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in their cities. <sup>2</sup> Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples <sup>3</sup> and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” <sup>4</sup> And Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: <sup>5</sup> the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. <sup>6</sup> And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.

**Matthew 12:22-30**

<sup>22</sup> The demon-oppressed man who was blind and mute was brought to him, and he healed him, so that the man spoke and saw. <sup>23</sup> And all the people were amazed and said, “Can this be the Son of David?” <sup>24</sup> But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, “It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons. <sup>25</sup> Knowing their thoughts, he said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid to waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. <sup>26</sup> And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? <sup>27</sup> And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore, they will be your judges. <sup>28</sup> But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. <sup>29</sup> Or how can someone enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house. <sup>30</sup> Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.

## Introduction

Last week we heard the message Jesus proclaimed throughout all of Galilee. He said in Matthew 4:17, *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”* All four of the Gospel writers (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) give testimony to the fact that this was indeed the message Jesus proclaimed. Mark puts it this way in Mark 1:14-15, *“Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.’”* Luke records for us what Jesus said in Luke 4:43. Here Jesus tells his disciples, *“I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose.* And then in John 3:3 we hear what Jesus whispered to Nicodemus in that private encounter, *“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”* The coming kingdom of God was the good news Jesus proclaimed.

What was the good news of the kingdom of God that Jesus came to proclaim? We can reach back into history to illustrate the good news that Jesus proclaimed throughout Galilee. About 500 years before the birth of Christ, the Persians were the major world power that occupied the world’s center stage. Their king, Darius, was always trying to extend the outer boundaries of the Persian Empire. He is the king in the book of Daniel who throws Daniel into the lion’s den and who also pays for the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. In an effort to expand the Persian Empire, he sought to conquer the Greeks. Their two armies met at a town called Marathon, not far from Athens. However, the Greeks held their ground against the Persian invaders. The Persians lost 6,400 men in that battle, while only 192 men of Athens died in the conflict. A soldier by the name of Pheidippides ran 26.2 miles back to Athens to announce the victory.

The Greek word used to proclaim this “good news” is the word *euangelion* from which we get the word “gospel.” What was the “good news” that the first ever “marathon” runner (by the way he dropped dead after proclaiming “We won!” - which is why I have never run a marathon!) proclaimed. He proclaimed victory! The enemy is defeated! Peace is restored! Our king reigns! That is exactly the message that Jesus is proclaiming when he announces the “good news of the kingdom of God.” He has come to defeat our enemy. He brings victory. He ushers in peace. He reigns as king. Isaiah put it this way, *“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news [gospel] who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns.’”* Paul picks up on this verse in Romans 10 when he asks how can people believe unless they hear and have someone sent to tell them about Jesus. Then he says, *“How beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news.”*

When Jesus proclaims “*the good news of the kingdom of God*” he is proclaiming that in his coming God is bringing his kingdom—his good rule and reign—to earth. George Eldon Ladd puts it this way, “God is now acting among men to deliver them from bondage to Satan. It is the announcement that God, in the person of Christ, is doing something—if you please, is attacking the very kingdom of Satan himself.”<sup>1</sup>

This is good news, isn't it? To think that we could see the day when evil is eradicated and there is no more death. Do you need evidence this morning that there is such a thing as a “kingdom of darkness?” Really? Have you not tasted the darkness of injustice, wrongs committed against you at every level of life: home, neighborhood, work, government, society . . . church (wherever there are people)? At the same time, have you ever been taken back by the dark thoughts and motives of your own heart; the judgments, grudges, bitterness's and the curses you wish to call down on your enemies? Do we not confess our own capacity to be influenced by the kingdom of darkness when we pray, “*lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*” We know the darkness experienced in severed relationships. We know the ultimate darkness that grips the heart when God seems inaccessible because there is too much water under the bridge of our lives—have we strayed beyond the point of no return? And then, what about the curse of darkness, the final veil that is placed over our lives: death. When the eyes are closed for the final time and the remains are committed to the earth—ashes to ashes and dust to dust—it is a darkness that seems so final and so hopeless. But then here comes Jesus with good news like no other. *The kingdom of God is at hand.* All of this darkness is defeated in Jesus, including death itself.

There is a critical question that emerges from our passages this morning. How can we know that Jesus can overcome the kingdom of darkness? Is he really the one? The question is asked in Matthew 11:3, “*Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?*” The question is asked another way in Matthew 12:23, “*Could this be the Son of David?*” Does Jesus have the power to *deliver us from the domain of darkness* and does he have the power to defeat evil, sin and death? Is he the Son of God? Is he the promised Son of Man? Is he the “Coming One—the Messiah? Is he the One?

Jesus answers both questions by appealing to his miracles. Through his miracles, Jesus is declaring that he has the power to defeat evil, conquer death and bring the kingdom of God to this world that is held in bondage. Last week we looked at the message of Jesus and noticed that Jesus has a way of turning things upside down. This week, we look at the miracles of Jesus and we affirm that Jesus has the power to deliver us from sin and death. He has the power to deliver you from sin and death.

## The Power of Jesus: Greater Than My Circumstances

The first question comes out of Matthew 11:1-6 and it comes from an unlikely source. Who asks the question in verse 3, *“Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?”* It is John the Baptist who is asking the question here. It is John the Baptist who seems to be wrestling with uncertainty regarding Jesus. It is a bit surprising, isn’t it?

John the Baptist was called by God before he was even born to prepare the way for the coming Messiah. He was given the task to introduce the Messiah to anyone who would listen. He had a keen sense of keeping his place in relationship to the Messiah. He said of “the Coming One” in Matthew 3:11, *“he who is coming after me is mightier than I.”* And when Jesus comes to be baptized, John the Baptist is hesitant to do so, instead, recognizing who Jesus is, John humbly says, *“I need to be baptized by you, and you come to me?”* But at the insistence of Jesus, John baptizes Jesus and as Jesus is coming up out of the water he hears the voice from heaven—a heavenly stamp of approval—saying, *“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”* Isn’t he the one who confidently pointed to Jesus and said, *“Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”* There was no hesitation in John the Baptist’s conviction that Jesus was indeed the “Coming One.” But now, with a tone of uncertainty, we hear John the Baptist asking, *“Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?”*

The reason for John’s uncertainty is that his experience does not match his expectation for the Messiah. John was in prison. We saw in our passage last week, Matthew 4:12, John’s imprisonment was one of the reasons Jesus withdrew from Nazareth to the remote village of Capernaum. John the Baptist had spoken out against King Herod’s unlawful marriage and it landed him in prison. Looking around at his difficult circumstances, he is having a hard time finding the “good news” of the promised coming kingdom of God while sitting in a prison cell. And furthermore, you wonder how much is he aware of the fact that very shortly his head will be literally served on a platter and presented to the Queen? And yet, while he is languishing in prison, John the Baptist hears about the miracles Jesus is doing. It says in verse 2, *“Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples.”* They traveled 100 miles by foot to get an answer to John’s question. “Are you the Christ?” *“Are you the one who is to come?”* “Or, is there someone else we should be looking for?”

There is no more critical question to answer than the identity of Jesus. Who is Jesus? Is he really the Son of God? I had never thought before about how far John’s disciples traveled to get this question answered. They walked 100 miles to get an answer to this

question. How far are you “willing to walk” to get an answer to who Jesus is? C. S. Lewis said that “the Central Miracle asserted by Christians is the Incarnation”<sup>2</sup>—Jesus is God in the flesh. It is this miracle, he said, that gives credibility to the miracles of Jesus. If he is the Son of God, then the miracles he performed make sense. He is God! Once you know that Jesus is God, does it really surprise you that the one who created all things he can speak to the wind and calm the storm? Does it really surprise you that the one who breathed life into the first man can restore the sight of the blind, make the lame walk . . . Call someone back from the dead? This is the critical question: Is Jesus God?

To answer their question, *Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?*, Jesus appeals to his miracles in order to demonstrate that he has the power to bring about the promised kingdom of God. He responds to their question, by asking, “What do you see?” You almost get the sense that Jesus is rather incredulous and is saying, “What more do you want?” *“Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up and the poor have good news preached to them.”* Aside from all of this being self-evident, this was part of the EXPECTATION for the coming MESSIAH. In fact, Jesus is alluding to Isaiah 35:5-6 and what the Old Testament prophet said about the coming Messiah in his response to this question.

Matthew, writing to a Jewish audience, is building a similar case to demonstrate that Jesus has the power to bring about the kingdom of God. In Matthew 8-9, Matthew moves quickly from miracle to miracle, as if he is mounting evidence for an air-tight case for the identity of Jesus. So Matthew tells us how Jesus cleanses the leper, heals the centurion’s servant, heals Peter’s mother-in-law and when word gets out, a large number flocked to where Jesus was staying to be healed. We then see Jesus speaking to the wind and calming the storm. He delivers a man possessed by a demon, heals the lame paralytic lowered through the roof, raised a dead girl to life, gave sight to two blind men and healed a man possessed by a demon that made the man unable to speak. This is Matthew’s answer to the question of John the Baptist, and perhaps your question about Jesus. *“What do you hear and see?”* Look at the evidence of his miracles. They demonstrate that the kingdom of God has come—it is at hand—and that Jesus is the king who has the power to deliver us from our sin and from death.

There is something about this question of uncertainty that emerges from John the Baptist’s prison cell that we can all relate to as citizens of the kingdom of God. Before we are too hard on John the Baptist, I wouldn’t be surprised if in some form or another, this question—this uncertainty—has passed through your mind. It has mine. The

message of the kingdom of God comes with the promise of victory, hope, deliverance, salvation and peace. And yet, many of us are looking around at the “prison cell” of our struggling lives and we hear stories of miracles and changed lives—we hear the television preacher tell us to “name it and claim it” and there is a miracle waiting for you . . . but you are looking around at your circumstances only to find that your experience does not match your expectation. And your experience may not change. And so you begin to wonder, like John the Baptist, “Is Jesus the one, or should you look for another?”

The power of Jesus is greater than your circumstances and your circumstances do not change who Jesus is. We tend to think that the power of Jesus is most on display when we see a miracle. Michael Wilkins makes this observation about miracles from what Jesus said later in the chapter. He says in Matthew 11:23 that even though miracles were performed in Capernaum, they still didn’t believe.<sup>3</sup> And furthermore, where was it that Jesus defeated Satan? Where was his “battle of Marathon” where the kingdom of darkness was defeated? It was at the cross! And so this is why in the previous chapter we hear Jesus instruct his disciples as they are sent out to proclaim the good news of the coming kingdom he tells them that they too are to “take up their cross and follow.” The power of the kingdom of God is most on display in our weakness—our “prison cell.” This is why Jesus sends the message back to John the Baptist in verse 6, “*And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.*” He is calling John to look at Jesus through eyes of faith. “What do you see John? What do you hear John?” “Well, I hear that you are giving sight to the blind and opening deaf ears and raising the dead . . . I am hearing great stories!” “So, John, do you think I am the One?” Your circumstance does not change who Jesus is and what he has come to do. Has he not opened your eyes? Has he not given you ears to hear? Has he not brought you who were dead in your sins to life?

Jesus was teaching John the Baptist what he taught Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, “*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*”

The miracles of Jesus demonstrate that he is “the One we are looking for” - the one who has defeated the kingdom of darkness and has brought the kingdom of God’s salvation and rule to this broken world. It could be that the greatest miracle he performs in your life and through your life is the faith you display in whatever “prison cell” you find yourself. When you can say that the power of Jesus is greater than your circumstance, you give evidence that Jesus is God and that the kingdom of God has come.

## The Power of Jesus: Greater Than the Enemy

In Matthew 12, we hear the question about Jesus emerge again. This time it comes from a crowd of people who happen to witness one of the miracles Jesus performed. In Matthew 12:22 we read, *“Then a demon oppressed man who was blind and mute was brought to Jesus, and he healed him, so that the man spoke and saw.”* So the crowd who witnessed this miracle are amazed at what they just witnessed. Who knows how long this man was held in bondage like this? So rather naturally, they look at each other and they wonder out loud, *“Could this be the Son of David?”* The title *“Son of David”* is a title for the coming Messiah. In the Old Testament, David was promised that he would have an heir who would sit on the throne and reign with righteousness forever. Could this be, the crowd wondered out loud, the Messiah?

When the religious leaders, the Pharisees, heard the crowd asking this question, they were quick to throw cold water on the notion that Jesus might be the Messiah. Granted, they couldn't deny what happened. The man was standing there right in front of them. He had been oppressed by a demon. He was blind. He couldn't talk. But now, through an encounter with Jesus, he has been set free from this bondage and he has been healed. That is the great thing about a personal testimony. You may not believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that through what Jesus has done on the cross your sins can be forgiven and you can know God in this life and the life to come. But you cannot discount my story. You cannot discount the stories of countless people who have encountered the living Christ and the change he has brought in our lives. Tim Keller says it this way. “It is hard to argue with the well-known, somewhat overwrought saying that, ‘all the armies that ever marched, all the parliaments that ever sat, all the kings that ever reigned’ have not had the impact on the world of ‘this one solitary life.’”<sup>4</sup> And so here we are, in the crowd that spans 2000 years, and we see the lasting impact that this one life has made and continues to make and we can't help but wonder, *“Could this be the Son of David?”*

The world was moved deeply this past Easter as they heard the Italian opera singer, Adrea Bocelli, standing in front of a larger cathedral in Italy, as he sung so beautifully the hymn *Amazing Grace*. It is a hymn that tells the testimony of the writer, John Newton. He was a slave trader who was as vile and profane as they come. In the middle of a storm, while transporting slaves to be sold, he cried out for God's mercy and this marked his conversion. Over time, he began to study Christian theology and became an ordained minister. As I listened to Bocelli sing with such simplicity and beauty, I couldn't help but give thanks for the story that was being broadcast around the world through his song. “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound. That saved a wretch like. I



once was lost, but now am found. Was blind, but now I see.” That was the testimony of the man Jesus healed in Matthew 12. You may not want to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, but you cannot deny the change that Jesus makes in the man in Matthew 12, nor the change in the man who wrote *Amazing Grace*, nor in the change of countless numbers of people for over 2000 years, nor in the change he has brought to your life and mine. *Could this be the Son of David?*

Trying to dampen any enthusiasm the crowd might have for Jesus, the Pharisees actually said that the power Jesus used to cast out the demon actually came from Satan himself. Jesus responded by saying that would be absurd. *“Every kingdom divided against itself is laid to waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?”* In his response, Jesus is acknowledging that there is a kingdom of darkness and there is such a person as “the evil one” . . . Satan. But it is not like this is the first time we encounter him in the story of the Bible. In fact, you find him in the beginning of the story of the Bible, as the serpent who tempts Eve and who leads Adam to de-god God by wanting to be like God by determining and defining for ourselves what is good. The result is that this world God has made is under the curse of sin and death reigns.

Paul captures the current plight of our world and the reality of the kingdom of darkness in Ephesians 2:1-3 when he writes, *“Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God’s anger, just like everyone else.”* In other words, you and I are that man in Matthew 12 who was under the oppression of Satan and blind to the truth of Jesus and unable to speak. But then Jesus came and set us free!

And so Jesus answers their question, *“Could this be the Son of David?”* by saying in verse 28, *“But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.”* Through this miracle, Jesus is demonstrating that he has the power to defeat Satan and the kingdom of darkness. He has the power to bring the kingdom of God to this world. I love what he says in verse 29. *“Or how can someone enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man?”* The only one who can *“bind the strong man”* is the one who is stronger.

It is what we sing in the hymn *A Mighty Fortress is Our God*. “And though this world,

with devils filled, should threaten to undo us. We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us. The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him. His rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure. One little word shall fell him.” The strong man has come. Through the miracles of Jesus, he demonstrates that he has the power to deliver us from the kingdom of darkness. Hallelujah! Victory has come! The kingdom of God is at hand! Jesus reigns over all things! The power of Jesus is greater than the enemy and the kingdom of darkness.

## Conclusion

Last week we heard Jesus proclaim the message of the kingdom of God. *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*” This week we were assured that Jesus has the power to bring the promised kingdom of God and he demonstrated his power through his miracles. Next week, we will see how Jesus brings the kingdom of God to us. He does it through the cross and his resurrection from the dead. The kingdom of God has come! Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:26, *“The last enemy to be destroyed is death.”*

Jesus has the power to deliver you from your sin. He has the power to turn your life around. He has the power to conquer death—and he already has.

Could this be the One? Could he be the Son of God? If he rose from the dead, there is no other conclusion that you can make. History tells us that there is an empty tomb. History tells us that the early eyewitnesses saw him and that was the message of the church from the beginning. And history tells us of the countless number of lives that have been changed.

That is what the miracles tell us. Jesus has the power to bring the kingdom of God to this broken world. It is a power that can set you free from your sin. Repent! Confess your sin and turn in faith to the living and risen Savior and Lord. In simple prayer, cry out to God, as best you know how, ask for his mercy based on the cross of Jesus. And then begin to follow him. The power of his kingdom will come to bear on your life and he will change your life.

As you walk in the way of God’s kingdom, remember that the power of Christ will shine in and through you life in your weakness. So, don’t let your “prison cell” cause you to think that God’s power is not evident or on display in your life. Quite the contrary. Walk by faith and be assured that the one who is stronger is the one who gives you strength and his strength shines through you as you walk by faith.

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<sup>1</sup>George Eldon Ladd *Gospel of the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959) 47

<sup>2</sup>C. S. Lewis *Miracles* (1947; repr., New York: Touchstone, 1996) 143

<sup>3</sup>Michael Wilkins *Matthew: The NIV Application Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004) 447

<sup>4</sup>Tim Keller *Making Sense of God* (New York: Penguin Books, 2018) 229

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## Getting To Know Me Questions

1. Check in with each other. Looking back over the past week . . . .  
What are you most thankful for?  
What challenge are you facing? (How can the group be of help?)

## Diving Into The Word

2. Take a glance at Matthew 8-9 and look at the many miracles Jesus did. Pick one of them and read the passage. What does this miracle tell you about the power of Jesus?
3. Read Matthew 11:1-6. Can you relate to John the Baptist's uncertainty? How so? What causes you to doubt your faith?
4. Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. What do you learn about the power of Jesus through this passage? What encouragement does this passage give you? How do these verses apply to your life right now?
5. Read Matthew 12:22-30. What encouragement does this passage give you as you live out your faith? See also 1 John 4:4
6. Read Ephesians 6:1-8. How does this passage compare to Matthew 12:22-30?

## Taking It Home

7. As a closing prayer, reflect on what God has impressed upon your heart from your conversation and offer the following brief prayers:

Thank you for \_\_\_\_\_

Help me \_\_\_\_\_