

Matthew 12:29 - The Binding of the Strong Man

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[0 : 00] Well, tonight I'd like us to look together at Matthew chapter 12 and we're going to focus on the incident described to us in verses 22 to 30 and I'll just read it again.

Then a demon oppressed man who was blind and mute was brought to Jesus and he healed him so the man spoke and saw. But all the people were amazed and said can this be the son of David?

But when the Pharisees heard they said it's only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons. Knowing their thoughts he said to them every kingdom divided against itself is laid 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? And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges.

But if it is by the spirit of God that I cast out demons then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods unless he first binds the strong man?

[1 : 13] Then indeed he may plunder his house. Whoever is not with me is against me and whoever does not gather with me scatters. And in particular I want us to focus on verse 29 which is really a parable that Jesus tells.

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.

Now in order to understand what is being taught to us here it's good to think a little bit about the build up to this event. As I'm sure we know after Jesus' baptism he began a public ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit.

It was from that point that the Spirit came down upon him and he went preaching and healing and travelling around. And a key part of his ministry was performing miracles.

We read throughout all the Gospels of the amazing things that he did. He healed people, he fed people, he provided for people. He even calmed the wind and the waves and as we read here he cast out demons from people who were possessed by them.

[2 : 29] Now the purpose of these miracles was to function as signs that show us who Jesus is so that we might believe in him.

And of course that's very very logical. It's quite interesting that a lot of people would say nowadays that belief in miracles is illogical and it's irrational.

Many many people reject the New Testament because they say miracles don't happen and believing in them is irrational. But the opposite is true.

The miracles recorded for us here are entirely logical with the message that the Bible is proclaiming because if someone claims to be the Son of God, if somebody walked in here and said that they were the Son of God, I think it is perfectly reasonable and totally logical to say well if you are the Son of God can you perform a sign?

Can you do something extraordinary that would serve as evidence? And of course that's exactly what Jesus did.

[3 : 45] The miracles were logical evidence demonstrating who Jesus really is.

But one of the remarkable things that a passage like this records for us is the fact that some people who witnessed these miracles used these miracles not as a reason to believe in Jesus but as a reason to reject him and oppose him.

It seems almost unbelievable. You think to yourself if I saw Jesus do one of these miracles then I would definitely believe in him because I would know.

And yet time and time and time again people saw him perform these miracles and yet they still opposed him.

That raises a very important point in terms of the defence of the historical accuracy of scripture because as we see here and in many other cases the enemies of Jesus in this case the Pharisees did not for one minute deny that Jesus performed miracles.

[5 : 06] The enemies of Jesus today deny that he performed miracles. They say nobody can perform miracles so Jesus didn't. But Jesus' opponents when he lived didn't for one minute say he didn't perform these miracles because there were so many eyewitnesses to the miracles of Jesus that anybody who said he didn't do that would have looked like a complete fool.

And we always must remember that the Bible is recording for us the historical record of eyewitnesses. People often mock the Bible and say oh it's a collection of fairy tales that sort of thing never happened.

But the truth is and our response to anybody says that is that the Bible is a collection of eyewitness testimony. These people saw these miracles.

Nobody even Jesus' enemies went around saying he didn't do them. And that's the interesting thing. People who hated Jesus did not for one minute deny that he performed miracles and many of them saw him perform these miracles with their own eyes.

However even though they saw these miracles they did not follow Jesus, they did not believe in him. Because they opposed Jesus and because they sought to destroy him and stop him they tried to attribute this miraculous power to an ungodly soul.

[6 : 37] So basically they were saying yes he can perform miracles but he doesn't do that in the power of God. He does it through the power of Beelzebub.

And in saying that they are saying that it is by the power of the devil that Jesus is doing these miracles.

The word Beelzebub means Lord of the Flies or Lord of Filth and it's a name given to Satan as the prince of demons.

So the Pharisees are basically saying okay so Jesus performed miracles, yeah that's fine but it's not by the power of God. It's by the power of Satan. And of course that's an utterly awful blasphemous thing to think or to say.

But as verse 25 tells us Jesus knew their thoughts and as he so often does he showed them the foolishness of what they are saying.

[7 : 42] In verse 25 and 26 he basically points out to these Pharisees that what they are saying makes absolutely no sense at all. He says every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste.

No city or house divided against itself will stand. If Satan casts out Satan he's divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?

Jesus is basically saying that you're saying that I'm using Satan to cast out Satan. That's ridiculous. A kingdom divided against itself will not stand.

You are making no sense at all. And then in verse 27 he puts the onus back on the Pharisees and he says that exactly the same accusation applies to them.

If I cast out by demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. See Jesus is saying if one of you were to cast out a demon or if one of your number, how do you know that they are not doing it by Beelzebub as well?

[8 : 52] Jesus just shows that the very thing that they are accusing him of applies to them as well. He's saying any one of your number who casts out a demon will be your judge as well.

So he shows them the foolishness of what they're saying. And it's interesting to note this is a really, I want to pause for a moment here because this is a good lesson in terms of dealing with opponents to the Gospel.

Jesus doesn't fly into a rage. Jesus doesn't insult the Pharisees in retaliation. Remember they have insulted him. They've basically called him a devil which is a hideous insult.

Jesus doesn't fly into a rage. He doesn't insult them back. He simply points out that they are talking nonsense. And there is a good lesson for us in terms of dealing with opponents of Christianity.

Sometimes you'll see people and they'll engage with the secular society or they'll engage with people who want to oppose Christian values in some way or another.

[10 : 05] And it just quickly descends into a kind of slugging match and it's insults and anger and frustration and this and that and the next thing. You never see that in Jesus.

But what you do see is Jesus showing them that their arguments do not add up. And we want to aim to do the same.

We face opponents of Christianity. We want to try and show that their views don't add up in a gentle wise humble way. But ultimately logic is on our side not on theirs.

So for example we could read this passage to everyone in Carlyway and some people will probably say well I think that's a lot of rubbish because there's no such thing as demons.

People might say that. No such thing as demons. So this is just a fairy tale. It's just a nice story told to teach a moral lesson. What would you say to somebody who said that?

[11 : 10] How would we respond? Well we would want to try to respond in a rational logical way to show that what this person is saying to us does not add up.

So first of all we could say to them well you're making a very very big assumption. Person just says demons don't exist because that's their world view and they haven't necessarily thought it through but they're just dismissing something on the basis of a big assumption.

And what you really want to do is look at evidence and say well what evidence is there for demons? Well often you will find that people who oppose Christianity and who are maybe quite focused on a secular or a naturalistic world view will generally think that humanity is basically good.

So people will say that there's just that general common goodness and people should be respected in their views and on the whole humanity is good.

That's often the general world view. And we don't believe that demons exist, we're generally good. But if you look at the evidence in the world around you you see that there are continual acts of extreme evil.

[12 : 37] The doctrine of sin, the reality of evil is I think the easiest doctrine in the Bible to prove because it's everywhere.

And further to that you can see that throughout history there has been a constant interest in the spiritual realm. And even in this modern world today that seems to be so sophisticated there are still so many people, so many people who are drawn to the world of spirits and occult and all that kind of stuff.

And so really the evidence is on our side and the person who says there's no such thing as demons has got a lot more explaining to do than we do.

And it's reminding us that when we face opponents it's very easy to panic and to think I don't know what to say. But far better to take our time and to think about what this person is saying, to think about what assumptions they're making, to think about what evidence backs up the claims that they are making and to try and look for the fact that at some point people who oppose the Bible will be contradicting themselves in their own logic and in their own argument.

We could say much more about that, maybe we'll look at that in more detail at a future time. But I suppose the best thing to remember is this, no one ever beat Jesus in an argument and no one ever will.

[14 : 23] And as we learn from him we can equip ourselves to deal with opponents as well. But that was just to one side and it's good to think about that. Jesus points out the foolishness of the Pharisees thinking and then he goes on to say something really important which is what I want to focus on in more detail tonight.

He says in verse 28 and 29, if it is by the spirit of God that I cast out demons then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can someone enter that strong man's house and plunder his goods until he first binds the strong man, then indeed he may plunder his house.

Now this is a very significant verse in terms of the Gospels but it's a easy verse to look at and think well what is Jesus talking about?

And especially this little parable in verse 29, what does that mean? And when you look at that I suppose the key questions are who is this strong man and who is the person entering his house which is effectively a description of a thief.

You've got a strong man who has a house and property and you have a thief whose intention is to go into the house, bind the strong man and plunder, take, claim all of his goods.

[15 : 48] Who's the strong man? Who's the thief? Well often in literature we would associate strength with the hero, wouldn't we?

We tend to think the strong man is the hero and we would tend to associate a thief, a plunderer with being the villain.

That's probably a common approach to literature. But that's not what we find in this parable because the strong man is Satan.

The person entering the house is Jesus. Jesus has come to establish the kingdom of God and in order to do that he has come to bind Satan and to strip him of all his power and to plunder and reclaim all that Satan has tried to bring into the kingdom of darkness.

Strong man is Satan and the man entering the house is Jesus and this verse is talking all about the great battle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan.

[17 : 22] And I want us just to spend a wee while tonight thinking about this in a bit more detail. I hope you all agree with me so far as to who's who in this parable but I hope by the end we'll all see this together.

It's important to note to begin with that Jesus describes Satan as a strong man. That reminds us that Satan is not some feeble opponent. He is a strong man.

He is a ruler over a powerful kingdom of darkness. And the point that we have to recognise is that up to this moment in history, up to the coming of Jesus Christ, the whole history of the world is shaped by the fact that it is under the grip of Satan.

The world up to this point is under Satan's rule. How do we know that? Well, back in Genesis God created the world and so the world belongs to God.

It is his. He is the creator, the world, the universe and us are his creation. But when God created the world, although he is the one who has absolute sovereignty over it, he delegated authority to humanity.

[18 : 43] In particular, he delegated that authority to Adam. He said to him, you are to have dominion over this creation.

So Adam was created in the image of God. He's there on earth to represent God. And in many ways, he is there as a king, ruling over God's creation through this power, this authority that has been delegated to him.

Adam is there to function as a ruler. But of course, Satan came and deceived Adam and Eve. And in doing so, he led them into rebellion against God.

So Adam, instead of being God's representative and the delegated ruler over creation, Adam now becomes a rebel, opposing God and disobeying him.

And the result of that was that the world was brought under Satan's usurped dominion. It wasn't a legitimate dominion, but it was a usurped dominion, claimed falsely, claimed in a rebellion, claimed in a coup, if you like.

[20 : 01] But it is under Satan's control. Satan now becomes a dominant force in the world.

And you only have to read Genesis chapter four, five and six to see the proof of that, because the world descends into chaos.

And that continued throughout the history of the Old Testament and throughout the pages of scripture leading up to this point.

We constantly read about the fact that God's people face continual opposition and harassment from opposing nations.

That's a theme that we see running through the whole of the Old Testament. Always remember that at the heart of that is the conflict between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of evil.

[21 : 00] That's why we see war, violence, conflict and hostility repeatedly taking place in the history of the Old Testament. It is a war between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of evil.

As we were speaking to the children this morning, all of this is traced back to Genesis chapter three where God said to the serpent that there will be enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent.

Kingdom of God versus the kingdom of evil. There is this battle going on. And the key point is that up until the New Testament era began, Satan has the upper hand.

How do we know that? Well, what did Jesus call Satan?

He called him the ruler of this world. Satan had the upper hand.

[22 : 14] And that grip that Satan has over the world is ultimately through the power of death. That's his secret weapon.

And we read at the very beginning of the service Hebrews 2 14 to 15, it says in those verses the devil is the one who has the power of death. And we live under the fear of death's power.

We are slaves in the devil's kingdom, bound under his usurped authority. The devil is ruling over the earth and that rule is grounded in the power of death.

Now, I have a diagram that I hope will help with this. So this is just to recap what we've said.

This is how it was at the beginning and how it was meant to be. God rules in heaven. He creates the world and he places Adam on earth to rule as his representative with delegated authority.

[23 : 21] So that's how it should be. That's how it was Genesis 1, Genesis 2. Heaven and earth all under God's rule, but the rule on earth delegated to humanity.

However, Satan leads Adam into rebellion and he claims dominion on earth. Satan can't claim dominion in heaven.

He has been cast out of heaven and he cannot claim dominion there, but he goes for the earth. And so I've changed it from green to red to show that now the world is under his rule, if you like, it's his kingdom.

And for us on earth for humanity, we are enslaved under the power of death.

So that's the key point. Satan grabs, steals dominion on earth and if you like taking the place that we should have had, he enslaves us and the power that he uses to enslave us is the power of death.

[24 : 38] And the reality of that is confirmed by a simple question. Are you afraid of death?

Now a secular worldview, a worldview that rejects the Bible should view death as the most natural thing in the world.

In fact, if you hold to a view that everything is just the result of natural selection, logically you have to regard death as a good thing because it's simply aiding the survival of the fittest.

That's a secular worldview, but a biblical worldview regards death as an enemy.

And I don't know about you, but to me that makes far more sense.

[25 : 45] And so that's where the world is up to this point. Satan indominion and humanity enslaved.

And Satan is a strong man. And so he's not a feeble opponent and it's not a pathetic kingdom that he has. It has immense power and has had huge influence over the face of the world.

And the key question is this, if Satan is the strong man who rules over the world, what is God doing about it?

Is he just staying in heaven and leaving earth under Satan's rule? What's he doing? Well, as we said, all of this is pointing us to the kingdom conflict that has shaped the history of the world since the fall.

And that's the key word, kingdom, because God rules on his throne. He is there on the throne of his kingdom in heaven. And humanity should be ruling on his behalf on earth, but Satan has grabbed that rule, that earthly rule for himself.

[27 : 01] So we've got God ruling in heaven where Satan can't threaten him. But what is God doing about the situation on earth? What is God doing to restore things to the way that they should be?

Well, that's the amazing thing about the Old Testament. When you read through the Old Testament, you see that God initiates and implements a glorious plan of salvation and restoration.

And there are key Old Testament people like Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, who are all part of that plan. And the momentum builds and builds and builds and builds.

And the high point comes with David when God appoints his king on earth. And so if we think in terms of thrones, you've got the throne of God in heaven and you've got Satan ruling over this world.

But now in David, you have God's throne established on earth.

[28 : 05] So in David, you have a king on earth who's not a citizen of Satan's kingdom. He is king in God's kingdom. And the throne of David is therefore a small step back to the way things are meant to be.

It's nowhere near where things were with Adam, where he had dominion over the whole earth. David only has a small territory, but nevertheless, it is a kingdom that stands in opposition to the rule of Satan that covers the rest of the earth.

So we can see it there. God establishes his throne. So a wee, wee bit goes back to being green.

God establishes his throne over his people in Israel. And so we think, wow, everything is going back the way it should be.

But then David died. And after David's death, his throne weakened and his kingdom ultimately crumbled.

[29 : 06] And you would look at that and you would think the strong man was too strong. The devil seems to be having his way.

And by the time we reach the end of the Old Testament, humanity is still under the rule of Satan. God's throne in heaven is unchallenged.

But David's godly throne has been overcome. And what the world really needs is for the power and authority of God's throne to come and sit on David's throne on earth.

The world needs God's might and power and strength, not just in heaven, but here on earth. In other words, the world needs God's kingdom to come.

And in order for that to happen, you need the heir to the throne in heaven to also become the heir to the throne of David.

[30 : 18] And that is exactly what we find in Jesus Christ. Because when Jesus came, what did he say?

He said the kingdom of God has come. And so now Jesus, son of God in heaven, is also son of David taking up the throne on earth.

Jesus is heir to the throne of heaven. Jesus is heir to the Davidic line. A descendant of David come to establish God's kingdom here on earth.

And the people who saw Jesus performing miracles started to realize this. Because what did they say? When they saw these miracles, they said in verse 23, can this be the son of David?

And in the miracles that Jesus performed, he is demonstrating the fact that he is king. He showed his authority over nature by calming the storms. He showed his authority over the kersh of sin when he healed the sick.

[31 : 37] He showed his authority over the powers of darkness when he cast out demons. All of these were glorious proof that the kingdom of God has come. And the devil can't stop him.

He tries to. Tried to stop him by slaughtering infants in Bethlehem. Tried to stop him by tempting him at the outset of his ministry. They tried to stop him by sending legions of demons to confront him.

But he can't. Why can't he? Because the strong man has been bound. The strong man has been bound.

And do you see the amazing change that's taking place? Jesus is reclaiming the world for God's kingdom.

But remember what we said. Ultimately the power, the key to the power of Satan's kingdom lies in the power of death.

[32 : 44] That's where the power really lies. And so the ultimate battle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of evil is a battle over death.

And so that's why Jesus said when he was approaching the cross he said the ruler of this world is coming. This is the key battleground.

Yes he has been confronted by the devil as an infant. Yes he's been confronted by the devil as he began his ministry. Yes he's been confronted by the devil again and again and again by these evil spirits that have come before him and opposed him.

But these were just small confrontations compared to the great battle at Laya Head. Because this battle is all about the power of death.

Because we are under the power of death because of what the devil has done. And Jesus has come alongside us to rescue us. He's come to be one of us.

[33 : 46] He's come to be our deliverer. So in order to do that he is going to have to go to the very point of death himself. And so when Jesus dies on the cross he steps out onto that battlefield where every other human being has been found powerless.

David couldn't defeat death. Joshua couldn't defeat death. Abraham couldn't defeat death. No human being has ever been able to stand up to the power of death. Jesus comes, he steps up onto the battlefield and the most powerful weapon of the kingdom of darkness is unleashed on Jesus.

And there on the cross the devil throws everything he can at God's kingdom. At God's kingdom.

And if you were there on the Friday of that crucifixion and if you could stand and see Jesus's dead body hanging on the cross you may well have thought to yourself.

The kingdom of God has come but it has been conquered by the strongman.

[35 : 10] Because Jesus died the power of the kingdom of evil, the power of death brought Jesus to death himself.

But what happened next? On the third day Jesus rose from the dead.

And the devil's most powerful weapon, the strongman's greatest strength is absolutely obliterated by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

You think about it, every single human being up until this point has been defeated by this deadly weapon that the devil has. This weapon of death, every single human being that has ever lived from Adam onwards has lost and succumbed to that battle.

And Jesus comes and he rises again. And here we see the power of the kingdom of God.

[36 : 30] And here we see the glory of Jesus our Savior because that power of death that was the strongman's greatest strength has now been rendered powerless.

That's why Paul can say in Romans 1 as we read this morning, Jesus descended from David according to the flesh was declared to be the Son of God in power through the resurrection from the dead.

It is through the resurrection that we see the power of Jesus. It is by his resurrection that he is declared Son of God in power because it is at that point that the kingdom of evil has been defeated.

Now the throne of God in heaven and the throne of David on earth are occupied by the same person. King Jesus has conquered death and he has crushed the kingdom of Satan.

And the result is now that all nations instead of being under Satan's dominion and instead of being slaves in fear of death are called to freedom and are called to life in the gospel.

[37 : 42] Remember the devil's greatest weapon is the power of death. The gospel's great message is the gift of life.

The kingdom of evil has been utterly obliterated. A decisive change took place at the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Here the strongman was defeated and the ruler of this world was cast out because Jesus has come to be our Savior.

And do you want to know the amazing, amazing thing? He did it all for you. He did it all for you. Because that's what Hebrews tells us.

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, that's you. Because you share in flesh and blood, he likewise partook of the same things. That through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is the devil.

And deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. That's you and that's me. He did it all for you.

[38 : 58] He did it all for you. And now instead of God's kingdom being a tiny geographical area at the eastern end of the Mediterranean in Palestine, now God's rule is being restored to what it originally was.

Creation is no longer the ruler of this world. God's kingdom has come. And what was the strongman's house is now being reclaimed as part of God's kingdom.

And do you know history proves that that is true? Because ever since the resurrection of Jesus, God's rule has spread and spread and spread and spread and will continue to do so until it reaches all the nations of the world, until everything is put back to the way it should have been.

That's exactly what Jesus did. He has come from the throne of heaven to take the throne on earth. He has crushed Satan. He has defeated him. And now the kingdom of God, the throne of David, the true Israel is not just a tiny area.

It is spreading all around the world. And the ruler of this world, the strongman, is being cast out.

[40 : 13] God is reclaiming everything, restoring everything for himself. Jesus is the ruler of this world.

He is the ruler of all the universe. He is king. Satan is a strongman. Jesus is stronger.

Dear me, is that the time? Sorry, the time has gone by very quickly. I want to conclude by saying two things very briefly.

First of all, this must be our worldview. This is how we must understand the world. Because this is the reality.

And this is what explains our experience. The battle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan explains morality. It explains why things are right, why things are wrong. A secular worldview has no way of explaining why anything is right, why anything is wrong.

[41 : 15] It explains history because the conflict, the suffering, the pain, the violence, the evil that still wreaks havoc in humanity is all because of sin and because of the devil's influence over this world.

And though he is defeated, he is still trying and he is still raging at the defeat that he has suffered. And it explains our experience because we all live in a constant battle between what God wants for us and what the devil wants for us.

This must be our worldview. Sin is an enemy seeking to destroy all that God has purposed for us. But praise be to Jesus Christ.

He is a defeated enemy. The strong man has been bound. The last of all, we have to ask ourselves the most important question that you will ever ask.

Whose side are you on? Because in this conflict between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan, there is no middle ground and there is no neutral territory.

[42 : 38] Jesus makes that absolutely clear in verse 30. He says, whoever is not with me is against me. Whoever does not gather with me scatter.

Jesus has come to deliver you from the power of death and from the kingdom of darkness and from a lost eternity. And he has done everything needed and his promise to you is the promise of life.

We all live in the fear of death but Jesus has come to give us life. And the simple question that Jesus asks is this, are you with me or are you against me?

Because we are all either with Jesus and against Satan or with Satan and against Jesus. And I know that none of you, none of you want to be with Satan.

So just nail your colours to the mast of God's kingdom. Bow before Jesus and say, Lord, I'm with you.

[43 : 47] I'm with you. Let's pray together. Lord our God, we thank you for what your word teaches us.

It explains our experience so clearly. It explains the history of the world so clearly because we know that we have before us this battle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of evil.

And how we thank you that Jesus, our Savior has come to bind the strong man. And how we thank you that you sent a Savior for us.

And we pray, oh God, that we would all, all, all just be on the side of Jesus Christ. Thank you so much that your message to us is come, join, be with me.

And so we pray, oh God, that every one of us would just seek the Lord while he may be found and call upon him while he is near. Thank you, Lord Jesus, for being our King, for being our Savior, for being our Deliverer.

[44 : 59] Thank you so much. Thank you. Amen.