

The Kingdom of God vs. The Kingdom of Darkness

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[0 : 00] Folks, this is the passage that Joe has given me to speak to you all on, a passage about demon possession, Beelzebul, and the unforgivable sin. So thanks to your minister for that. I don't know if this is payback because last time he asked me to speak, I didn't come because I had a sick bug. But if you were sitting there reading that passage, maybe you're new to the Bible and you're reading that and you're thinking, what is going on here? Do not worry. You are not alone. I remember the first time I looked at this passage, I thought the exact same thing. What is this passage about?

Now it is confusing. There's kind of confusing images, metaphors. It's confusing maybe to understand what is actually going on. But right at the heart, we can see maybe what this passage is about. Jesus is talking here about the reality of evil. So there's mention of demon possession, there's mention of Satan, there's mention of evil, there's also mention of Beelzebul. You might not know what that means unless you've listened to Bohemian Rhapsody by Queen. But it's just another term used to describe the devil. Literally, it means the Lord of the Flies. That's where that term comes from. And so what we read in this passage is a confrontation, and it comes from the Pharisees, but this is not about a confrontation between Jesus and the Pharisees. This ultimately is a passage about the confrontation between Jesus and Satan, the kingdom of God versus the kingdom of darkness.

And it's a confrontation that Jesus will say, we are not just standing back watching happen. It's a confrontation that we are not neutral on, that we will have a stake in. Now, for some of you already, this might sound a bit weird. It's like we're drifting into kind of horror movie territory here.

Really, you know, demons, demon possession, Satan? Well, the Bible makes it clear that there really is an unseen spiritual reality. And if you accept that there is a God, then it's not hard to accept that there is such a thing as the devil and demons. Evil is real, isn't it?

You cannot deny that. Some of you might even have been victims to great acts of evil. Turn on the news. What do you see? Great acts of evil. I was just reading this afternoon about that Olympian athlete in Uganda who was killed by her ex-boyfriend with him dousing her in petrol and then setting her on fire. That's evil. I found with folks in the scheme in Charleston that we minister to, you know, a lot of them actually don't need convinced that there's such a thing as evil spiritual forces. A lot of them will be into Ouija boards and tarot cards and horoscopes. They know that there's a spiritual reality that is dark, but what they're not convinced of is that there is a God who is infinitely more powerful than these evil forces. You see, the devil is real. Make no mistake, he is real. But the devil is not like how he's often portrayed in pop culture and in the movies.

[3 : 22] He's not going around possessing people, making their head rotate 360 degrees whilst they, you know, spew out pea soup. He's much more subtle and crafty than that.

There was an author called C.S. Lewis, and he wrote a book called The Screwtape Letters. And what that book is, it's an imaginary scenario of a senior devil writing to a junior devil trying to give him advice on how to tempt a young man who has just become a Christian. It's a great little book. But in the introduction to that book, Lewis wrote that he thinks there are two great mistakes we can make when it comes to thinking about Satan and demons. The first is to ignore them completely. Oh, they're not there, they're not real. And the second mistake is to see them in absolutely everything. So my car broke down. It must be a demon. Not everything has a demon, and it's not always obvious. But the chief tactic of the devil, the main thing he wants is for people to stay away from Jesus. That's his goal. Because here's what we're going to see in today's passage, and it really is shocking. If you are not on Jesus' side, then you're on the devil's side. But here's the encouragement. If you are on Christ's side, you are safe. You are safe. And there is no evil that will ever successfully harm you. No condemnation that will ever come to you. And all the evil, even

within your own heart, will be forgiven.

And you'll be with the King. As the Apostle John says of Jesus, he is the light of God that has come into the world, and the darkness has not overcome. And so this passage is a rallying call to give our lives to the only one who can save us from the evil that we see. The only one who can save us from ourselves. And so to that end, as you'll notice on your service sheet, I've just got two points from tonight's passage. Firstly, we're going to see an undeniable truth. God's King has come to overthrow evil and Satan. And then secondly, we're going to see an important choice. You're either with him or against him. Okay, let's look at the first point then. The undeniable truth. God's King has come to overthrow Satan and evil. So last week, I gather, if you were in Matthew's Gospel last Sunday evening, you would have heard Jesus talk about how he is God's King. He is the servant who is gentle and kind.

[6 : 11] A bruised reed he will not break. Wonderful passage. It would be great to preach on that. He will gently restore and forgive weary sinners. And so we see in Christ that there is a humility in him that is like nothing else. But do not let that blind you to the fact that there's also an immense, overwhelming power to Jesus. This carpenter from Galilee made an entire legion of demons cower before his feet. That's who he is. And yet he's so gentle that the children would run and play with him.

That's who he is too. And that's because he is the King who has complete authority over Satan and the demons and his angels. He is the only one who has complete authority over all evil and who can end all evil. God and the devil are not at it as equals. No, Jesus is in charge.

And in verse 22 of our passage, how does it begin? It's a tiny verse, but it's just a glimpse into the immense power of Jesus. Here we have a demon-possessed man, verse 22, who was made blind and mute because of his possession. And just like that, Jesus heals him. Matthew doesn't dwell on it. It's not a contest.

It's not a fight. Just like that, the demons are gone and this man is able to see and talk again. That is the power of Jesus. And it astonished the crowd so much, just at how instantaneous it was, that they asked themselves, could this be the son of David? Now, that's a big claim. For those of you who don't know, you read Matthew's gospel, he begins right in verse 1 by saying, Jesus is the son of David. It's a huge claim because a thousand years before Jesus, God made a promise to the great King David. And Matthew's saying, Jesus is the son of David. And Matthew's saying, Jesus is that promised king. And the crowds are thinking as they see this miracle, is this him? Now, we should just say this, Matthew is in no way suggesting that all disabilities are a result of demon possession.

He talks a lot in his gospel about the healings that Jesus did. And this is one of the rare times, very rare times, where it actually does come as a result of something demonic. And we have to also say, this is not something perhaps that we will see much of today. It's not to say that it could never happen. But I think it's important for us to remember that when Jesus walked on earth, that in itself was an unusual event. It's Jesus, God in the flesh, walking among us. And so there is a heightened spiritual activity from the other side in response to this. But I think Matthew puts this miracle here because he wants us to see something else. Jesus really literally did drive out a demon, heal a man who was both blind and dumb. But this man is also an illustration to us. An illustration of what? He's an illustration of the Pharisees who are opposing Jesus at this time. An illustration of all who oppose and reject Jesus. They're blind and they can't speak. So here's what I mean.

[9 : 57] Matthew 11 verse 25, Jesus said that God had hidden the truth about who he was from the wise and learned and revealed them to little children. In other words, the Pharisees, the wise and learned, they're blind.

They can't see the truth of who Jesus is, even when he is right in front of them. And because they are blind to Jesus, they can't speak well of Jesus. And I mean, in verse 23 there, they actually accuse Jesus of being in league with the devil. Now, here's a good wee thing to do when you come to a difficult Bible passage. Try and see if there's any ideas or phrases that are being repeated in the passage.

Normally, that's a good indication as to what the author is trying to convey. And I don't know if you noticed in this passage when we read it, but there is a lot in here about speaking. The Pharisees speak against Jesus. Jesus says in verse 34, they are speaking evil. And in verse 37, he says, their words will condemn them. So what do we have with these Pharisees opposing Jesus? They can't see Jesus.

They can't speak well of Jesus. Blind and dumb. And what causes the man in verse 22 to be blind and dumb?

Something demonic. So what is Matthew saying about the blindness and the dumbness of the Pharisees? Well, he's saying the devil is behind it. And that's how Satan operates today.

[11 : 35] Not through throwing your furniture across the room, but by blinding people to God and his Savior. To blind them to their need to come to Jesus. To corrupt people's hearts and therefore to corrupt the words that they will say about God. And so the apostle Paul says this very thing, 2 Corinthians 4 verse 4. He says, the God of this world, that's Satan, has blinded the mind of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. Now, that doesn't mean that we don't have responsibility for the wrong we do. We can't just say, oh, the devil made me do it. We certainly make choices and we will answer for those choices. But the truth is that there is a darker force behind it all. And the devil is quite happy to have people just living for themselves and ignoring God's King. It's like that film, *The Usual Suspects*. Have you ever seen that film?

It's a great film. In the film, you've got this bad guy called Kaiser Soze, who is this wicked man that evades the police and he kills everyone and no one knows who he is. No one sees him. But at the end, you get one of the best twist endings ever to a film. And sorry to ruin it for you if you've not seen it. I mean, it came out in the 90s. So if you've not seen it now, you probably won't see it. But it has this great twist at the end. You see Kevin Spacey in the film, he plays this disabled man who you would never suspect of anything. But it turns out, all along, he was Kaiser Soze. He was the main bad guy and no one knew it. He was right there among them and they didn't know it. And there's this great final scene where he is limping along. He's just come out of the police station after being questioned. And as he is walking along the road, the policeman is recounting the conversation he's just had with him. And you see Kevin Spacey's character, they see that he was feigning this disability. He gradually starts to straighten up and you realize at that moment all along, he was Kaiser Soze. And the policeman recalls something that Kevin Spacey says, which is this, the greatest trick that the devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn't exist.

He hides in plain sight, blinding us from the truth, corrupting this world. But Jesus has come to change that. He has come to make the blind see and the dumb speak. He has come with all the power and authority of heaven to drive out evil. He has come to bring in the kingdom of God like a shaft of light that drowns out all the darkness. God in all his goodness has come to end all that is wrong, all that is twisted, all that is corrupt. He's come to heal and restore we who are broken and enslaved.

And there's a good image of this in another book by C.S. Lewis. You should really read C.S. Lewis if you haven't. He wrote a series of kids' books called *The Chronicles of Narnia*. And the first one is called *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. Well, in those books there is this character called Aslan the Lion.

[15 : 02] He's meant to be like this allegory, this picture of Jesus. And in the land of Narnia in which the story is set, it is ruled by an evil witch who has put it under her spell so that it is always winter and never Christmas. Cold, hopeless, dark. But in the story, Lewis tells us that when Aslan arrives, the snow begins to melt and life starts to come back to Narnia because hope has arrived.

And it's a great little picture of God's King coming into this broken world as the darkness starts to melt.

Life, hope have arrived. This is the solution to all that's broken and messed up in this world. But what is crazy is that some people love the darkness so much that they will shun the light, as John says. And so these Pharisees right before them have irrefutable proof of God's power, of Jesus' power, but they cannot say, oh, this is from God. Because you know what happens if they say that Jesus is from God? It means that they all have to say, we're wrong and we can't do what we want anymore. And so many reject Jesus for that reason. I don't want to be wrong and I want to do what I want to do. And so rather than attribute his power to God, what do they do? They say, I must be the devil.

That's how the devil does it. And look at how Jesus responds. He basically responds by getting to see how stupid a suggestion that is. So he says to them in verse 25, every kingdom divided against itself against itself is laid waste and no city or house divided against itself will stand. And if Satan casts out Satan, he's divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? He's saying, look, to accuse me of being in line with the devil makes no sense when you see me driving out the devil

and his demons. Why would the devil fight himself? This would be like the gaffer on your football team saying to the striker at halftime, right, I want you to go out in the field and take apart one of our defenders. Make sure they can't do any defending. Steve Clark probably won't need to say that tonight given our defense. But that wouldn't make any sense. I ought to take out someone on my own team.

This is not from the devil, Jesus is saying to them. No, this is the spirit of God. And if it is the spirit of God, then you guys need to realize, verse 28, that the kingdom of God is right here in front of you. Then he gives another image in verse 29. And this is an image that's maybe familiar for some of you, familiar for a lot of our folks in Charleston. It's the image of a man breaking into someone's house. So you go into someone's home, Jesus talks about him being a strong man. If you go into someone's home and you want to rob them, you better make sure if they've been hitting the gym that you tie them up before you rob them. Otherwise, they might knock you out with the crowbar they keep beside their bed. And so Jesus is saying, look, I have bound, I have tied up the strong man that is Satan. I have stopped his hold on this world and I am plundering his house. What does he mean by that? What are Satan's goods? What's his house? Well, his house is this world and his goods are us.

[18 : 42] Think of the demon-possessed man that he heals at the start of this passage. He was trapped by the devil, but Jesus set him free. He plundered him from the arms of the devil. He gave him sight. He let him speak, but it's not just him. Jesus has done that for all who follow him. You see, here's the truth.

We know, we know that evil is real, but it's not just a thing that's out there. It's a thing that's in here, in all of us.

Every single one of us are sinners. We say, we do, we think things that are wrong, are against God. If you really saw my heart, you'd probably want nothing to do with me.

And Satan, well, he's against God, isn't he? And so if God is perfect and good, and we've rejected him and we've done stuff against him, how could we possibly think that we're on his side? By our nature, actually, we're on the side of the devil.

And God said he's going to destroy Satan, but here's the problem. If God judges the devil, then he has to judge me, right? So the devil has this accusation against me, where he can say to God, look, if you're going to punish me for doing wrong, then you have to punish Andy Robertson because he does wrong all the time. And so I'm trapped by that accusation.

[20 : 16] There's nothing I can do to break free from that. But Jesus has found a way to destroy the evil in my heart without destroying me. On that cross, he will die for my sin, suffering God's anger in my place so I can be forgiven and set free. And so now the devil has no accusation on me. The strong man is bound up and we belong to Jesus. He will end all evil. And when he comes back, it will be gone. But that begins now with coming to him for forgiveness. And that is why Jesus is now going to say, look, we all have a choice to make. Are we going to be with him or against him? It's the second point, important choice. Are you with him or against him? It's the Pharisees, not Jesus, who are in line with the devil. And so Jesus says, verse 30, this extremely important and controversial statement, whoever is not with me is against me and whoever does not gather with me scatters. In other words, boys, you don't sit on the fence here. It's not like, oh, you know, I'll have a little bit of Jesus at the weekend and then do what I want throughout the week. No, no, you're either with him or you're against him. That's it. And we must see that because, look, you can be a really nice, good person. But if you reject God and his Savior, that will have eternal consequences. Look at what Jesus goes on to say. Therefore, I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come. There is a way that human beings can treat God that is unforgivable. That's what he just said.

Jesus calls it here the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. What is that? Now, we've got to be so clear on this because so many Christians will get tied up in knots about this. I've had so many conversations with guys in the scheme, and they're reading through the Gospels, and they come to this, and they start panicking. What is this? Have I done this? And it can really mess with your head. Let me make it clear. Blaspheming against the Holy Spirit means to persistently and constantly reject and push Jesus away despite what you've heard of him. It's wanting nothing to do with Jesus. And so, in Matthew, Jesus' works come from the power of the Spirit of God. And these Pharisees

have seen it, but they want nothing to do with him. They want nothing to do with Jesus. In fact, they'll even call him evil.

So, this is really important. If you are worried that you have committed this sin, it is almost a sure and certain sign that you have not, because the people who do this don't care if they do it.

They don't care about Jesus. They reject him. And that rejection is seen primarily in what they say. Notice that focus on words again. The badness of their heart, of the Pharisee's heart, is seen in the bad fruit of their words. Verse 33. Verse 34, you brood of vipers, how can you speak good when you are evil?

Well, down in verse 36, Jesus says, their words will be held against them on the day of judgment. What they have spoken against God's Spirit will be used against them. So, blaspheming against the Spirit is persistently refusing the Spirit's call to come to Jesus to repent and be saved.

[24 : 22] Mocking Him, ignoring Him. It would be like, you know, imagine someone was in a burning building and they fall asleep with a cigarette in their mouth. The duvet catches fire. And they're sitting in the burning room when a fireman comes in to try and save them. And he offers to save them, knowing that it will cost him his own life. But rather than accept that offer of salvation, the person spits in the fireman's face, calls him all sorts of names, tells him, get lost. A person not only condemns themselves, they offend a rescuer. That's what the Pharisees are doing with Jesus. And so, if you don't follow Jesus, you must hear His call to come to Him. You need forgiveness. You need it. Don't reject God's offer of salvation. Don't spit in the face of His King who loves you and calls you to come to Him and find rest for your soul. You're either with Him or you're against Him. But here's the great news.

When you come to Him, what will He do for you? He says it in verse 31, and I bet you missed it the first time. I missed it. It's an amazing verse. What does He say in verse 31?

Therefore, I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven. Whoa. Every sin.

That word, that's what's mind-blowing. What about the time I insulted that person the other day, and I really made them feel awful? Every sin forgiven. What about that time in my past when I had an fear? Every sin forgiven. What about those times I've been getting high, where I wrecked my life, the times I've been enslaved by my addictions? Every sin forgiven. What about the time I gossiped about that person at work or at uni to try and make myself look good? Every sin forgiven.

What about the time that I was so greedy with my money that I just used it for myself, didn't help that person who needed it? Every sin forgiven. What about the time I had an abortion?

[26 : 45] Every sin forgiven. What about the time when I stole from people? What about the time when I got that person killed? Every sin forgiven. What about the time I failed as a father, or I failed as a husband, or I failed as a mother, or I failed as a wife? Every sin forgiven. Well, okay, but what about the times then when I've not just done wrong, but I've slagged Jesus, where I've insulted him, the times where I turned my back on him, the times where I was backsliding, the times where I just didn't talk about him because I bottled it in front of my mates or my colleagues. Well, if you come to Jesus, all that sin is forgiven too. That's what Jesus means in verse 32.

Even the words you've spoken against him can be forgiven. When you come to Jesus genuinely sorry for your wrong, asking for forgiveness, he will never, ever turn you away. All of it will be forgiven. You will be set free from all evil, from all condemnation. He will suffer for it in your place. How do I know that's happened to me?

Well, how do you speak about Jesus? Because if Christ is real for you, it will be seen in how you speak about him. The good tree will bear fruit of good words. By your words you will be justified, by your words you will be condemned. And Jesus is meaning there specifically the words we say about him.

If you believe with your heart and confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord, you will be saved. And so when Jesus, when you have been forgiven and the Holy Spirit is at work in your life, you speak of Jesus not with disdain, not as some kind of distant fictional character, not as someone that you couldn't really care about, but you speak about him with affection.

And that affection comes from a heart changed by him. Jesus, by his grace, will set us free from every sin, releasing Satan's hold on us and uniting us to him so that we share in his victory.

[29 : 03] So this is the question. Are you with him or are you against him? Let me pray. Father, we thank you that your king has come into this world to drive away all the darkness and evil and suffering. Jesus, what we see here is your power over evil, your power over the God of this world who can blind the mind of the unbeliever. You can make the blind see and the dumb speak.

Father, as we think about that, we look at ourselves and we realize that there was a time where many of us were just blind to who you were, where we couldn't speak well of you. And yet we marvel at your amazing grace that you forgave all our sins. You opened our eyes to see the truth. So we speak of you, Jesus, with great affection. We call you Lord. And Father, as we look out in the city of Aberdeen, we see that there are many who are blind and we know that you can open their eyes.

And we pray and ask that you will do that and that this will encourage us to go out and to speak about you to others, knowing that you can open the eyes of the blind, knowing that you're the only hope amidst the darkness and the evil. Father, we pray that many in this city will come to know you and they will see the great joy of knowing that every sin is forgiven because of what you have done for us on the cross. Father, would there be many in this city who say that they stand with you, not against you? We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.