

# Jesus' New World Order

Message 7

## *The Power of God's Kingdom*

Mark 4:35-6:6

### *The Weak*

Welcome to Nincompoops Anonymous. We are glad you could join us tonight. Just to let you know a little about us, our group is a sham. We were feeling mighty insecure about ourselves and our beliefs, so we put up this front organization to provide a crutch for ourselves. Our goal is to attract a lot of people so we can have strength in numbers. We feel real good about your presence here tonight, and hope you will come back every time we meet to make us feel even more secure. With your help, Nincompoops Anonymous will be the premier hangout for all weak-minded people at Lehigh.

Do you ever get the impression that this is what people are secretly thinking about you, the church, and Christians in general? Jesse Ventura, former professional wrestler and governor of Minnesota, wasn't very secretive about his remarks when he said this a few years ago in *Playboy* magazine: "Organized religion is a sham and a crutch for weak-minded people who need strength in numbers."<sup>1</sup> More recently scientist Richard Dawkins and writer Christopher Hitchens have published books denouncing Christianity. Dawkins' book, *The God Delusion*, has been a recent best-seller. He writes that "when one person suffers from a delusion it is called insanity. When many people suffer from a delusion it is called religion."<sup>2</sup> "He believes that "religion subverts science, fosters fanaticism, encourages bigotry against homosexuals, and influences society in other negative ways."<sup>3</sup> These sort of remarks are nothing new. Karl Marx is famous for his statement that religion is the opiate of the people. He considered that religion was merely a drug to keep the workers under control. Marx expected that when the people took over the state and began to live in communistic bliss, religion would disappear. The prevailing view for 70 years among the Soviets was that religion is for women and old people. Before the Soviets the Romans mocked Christians. The Christian ideal of loving one's enemy offended Roman pride, and Rome periodically attempted to purge the empire of the cancerous growth of the church.

Well, Rome eventually fell and left the remains of her empire in the west to the church. The Soviet Union is now a relic of history and the church is stronger than ever in that land. But people of all sorts still cling to the notion that Christianity is for the weak. People with ambition and intelligence seek to go into politics, academia, or business, depending upon whether they want to improve the world or improve their status in the world. But when was the last time you heard of someone who went go into Christian ministry because it is the way to shape the course of history? Do you know of anyone who became a Christian in order to gain power? No, Christianity in all ages is considered a hideout for the weak. Most people like to hold a positive opinion of Jesus, not connecting that He is the founder of the religion they despise. But the great German philosopher Nietze would not compromise on this point. He recognized that Jesus is at fault for beginning Christianity, and he did not hide his hatred of Christ.

Last week we examined three of Jesus' parables and saw that the core message they convey is the establishment of His Universal Kingdom. The first, the Parable of the Sower, provoked a discussion of "the secret of the Kingdom," which we saw was about how to enter God's Kingdom. It is only as we hear God's word, treasure it, think about it, and obey it that we produce fruit, which is the sign that we are in the

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<sup>1</sup> Reported in "The Mouth That Roars," *World*, Volume 14, (Number 39, 1999) p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_God\\_Delusion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_God_Delusion), accessed 10/16/2007.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

Kingdom. The other two parables taught that God's Kingdom grows. We do not know how, and often it seems like the Kingdom is in fact shrinking. But even though God's Kingdom begins as the tiniest kingdom, eventually it spreads and covers the entire earth. It becomes the greatest Kingdom of all, and overshadows all the other kingdoms.

Bold words. It is pretty brazen to claim that God's Kingdom is in the process of taking over the world, especially since it sure does not seem that way today! But that is the way it is with religion – cheap talk and no action. Anyone can *claim* to be a universal messiah, and there has been no lack of such crackpots throughout history. The difficulty is actually to *demonstrate* the power to back up such a claim.

This is what Jesus did in the incidents following these Kingdom parables. Before, He has demonstrated power over men, demons, disease, religion, scripture, and even sin. Isn't that enough to prove that He is the Son of God, the Messiah, the divine King who is ruling God's Kingdom? But in the passage following, He makes the first miracles seem like child's play.

### ***The Super-storm***

The text tells us that Jesus decided to cross the Sea of Galilee that evening after He had spent the whole day teaching the people. Teaching is exhausting, and Jesus was so tired He fell asleep in the boat. Now the Galilean fishing boats were not large. They were bigger than a rowboat, but much smaller than our modern vessels. When a great storm came up, the boat would be tossed around severely, but Jesus was so tired He slept through everything.

Storms at sea are always frightening, but Jesus was in good hands. Remember who His disciples were? Peter, Andrew, James, and John were fishermen. It was probably their boat they were using to cross the sea. They were well experienced at handling these boats, and surely had been in many storms before. So when we read that the storm was so great that it began to fill the boat, we can see that this was a real crisis. Apparently they were desperate because they even went and woke up Jesus. But what could He do? He was a carpenter, not a sailor. He would have gotten in the way. But the boat was filling with water. Judging by the way they approached Jesus, they apparently thought they were about to go down.

Now let's think about this. These are experienced fishermen. They know this sea, and they know boats. They have survived many storms before. But here they are, enlisting the help of a useless carpenter. What is going on? They are on the brink of drowning. This storm is a once-in-a-lifetime storm. Apparently it had the force of a hurricane, and although they had rowed and bailed for all they were worth, it was going to take them under. Like Captain Ahab facing the great white whale, these sailors were facing a force of nature so huge, so terrifying, they lost their senses. They were going to perish.

But then Jesus spoke. "Peace, be still." Can you imagine anything more ridiculous? Jesus talking to the storm? We might understand if He prayed for deliverance, or if He bailed water with superhuman speed. We could accept an ordinary miracle, but this is too astonishing. This storm was the most powerful force of nature the disciples had ever encountered. It practically killed them. But Jesus instantly controlled it, merely by speaking.

How would you have responded if you had been there in the boat? Would you have shaken Jesus' hand? No, you would have given Him a *hug*, wouldn't you? Maybe you would have laughed or cried with relief. Would you have thought to pray, thanking God for your rescue? But the disciples responded in none of these ways. They were afraid of Him. Did you notice that? It was *after* the storm had ceased that Jesus said, "Why are you fearful?" The text says that they "feared exceedingly." What is going on now? Why would the disciples have been afraid of Jesus *after* the storm?

The answer is found in their question, “Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?” They thought they had a great teacher and healer with them in the boat, perhaps even the Messiah. But now they understand that this man has incomprehensible power. The storm almost killed them, and Jesus instantly halted the storm without any effort. If He can do that to the storm, what can He do to *me*? They are trapped in a tiny boat with a power totally out of their control. At least the storm was outside the boat, but Jesus is right there beside them! Who is this man? How could He do this? And where did He come from?

The scriptures tell us who He is. There is one person who can calm the storm and still the waves. Psalm 93:4 says “The LORD on high *is* mightier than the noise of many waters, Than the mighty waves of the sea.” God controls the wind and waves. The only possible conclusion is that this man is God. Psalm 107 describes a situation so similar to the disciples’, it is almost as if the writer anticipated this event.

Some went down to the sea in ships,  
doing business on the great waters;  
they saw the deeds of the LORD,  
his wondrous works in the deep.  
For he commanded and raised the stormy wind,  
which lifted up the waves of the sea.  
They mounted up to heaven; they went down to the depths;  
their courage melted away in their evil plight;  
they reeled and staggered like drunken men  
and were at their wits' end.  
Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,  
and he delivered them from their distress.  
He made the storm be still,  
and the waves of the sea were hushed.  
Then they were glad that the waters were quiet,  
and he brought them to their desired haven.

Psalm 107:23-30

The disciples sure saw the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep. Their hearts melted and they came to their wits’ end. But to whom did they cry out? Who delivered them? The Lord! The Lord, who calmed the storm. But were they glad? Did they thank God? No, they were afraid of Jesus, the one who saved them. Why were they afraid of Him? Look again at their question – verse 38, “Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?” They doubt his care. They could accept a powerful man who cared about them, but now they are facing overwhelming strength, and they wonder if they can trust Jesus to love them.

The question facing you tonight is the same – “Who is this man?” Are you prepared to believe that the man Jesus who got tired and slept soundly in the storm is also God, the creator and ruler of the universe? Do you believe that Jesus, the King of God’s Kingdom, possesses this incredible power? And if so, do you fear Him? Or do you perceive that He *does* care for you? Do you believe that He will use His power to save you, or do you think He will use His power to crush you?

### ***The Super-demon***

No sooner had Jesus and His disciples fallen exhausted out of the boat after their harrowing trip than they were attacked by a maniac – a strong man. This was not your ordinary linebacker or Joe Foreman, or Hulk Hogan. This was a man energized by a horde of demons – 6,000 to be exact – and was able totally to terrorize everyone in his path. He was virtually a one-man army, and he rampaged throughout the countryside terrorizing everyone. The townspeople tried to control him. They used chains to tie him up so he would no longer threaten them, but his power was so great the chains were useless. He was the original Godzilla,

a monster utterly out of control.

So now we have 13 exhausted, defenseless men facing a maniac capable of ripping them to shreds. Surely the disciples thought their escape from the storm was only a short delay to their rapidly approaching death! If Satan ever had a chance to destroy Jesus' ministry, this was it. But wait! The maniac did not attack Jesus' band. He did not even try. What did he do? He worshiped! Whatever is going on here? Why would this evil creature worship Jesus? Why not engage Him in battle? For the same reason anyone surrenders – the opponent is far superior. Folks, here is the staggering truth. No matter how powerful evil is – and Satan is a real and powerful enemy – evil is no match for Jesus. These 6,000 demons immediately surrendered and begged terms of peace because they knew something the disciples did not know – that their master could never defeat Jesus. So they negotiated a settlement which allowed them to continue their evil ways.

Remember what Jesus said in chapter 3, “No one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. And then he may plunder his house.” (3:27) Do you see what is going on in this passage? This is Jesus' first visit to a Gentile region. Jesus invaded Satan's stronghold and is plundering his house. The strong man is falling to the stronger man. Satan can enslave people and dominate a culture, but when Jesus arrives, He immediately falls to the overwhelming power of the gospel.

So what about the terrible monster? Free from bondage to Satan, the monster was simply an ordinary man – a man with family and friends, a man with a life to live, but who had been enslaved by Satan. The townspeople could not see this. They had tried to enslave the man to protect themselves, but Jesus set Him free and made him safe for everyone. Jesus showed great compassion in His care for this poor wretch which no one else cared about. Invincible power and unfathomable love are joined in Jesus.

Do you know this Jesus? Or do you know some other Jesus? Is your Jesus able to overcome evil in the world and sin in your life, or is He too weak? Does your Jesus care deeply about you as well as the wretches of this world, or is He available only for religious purposes? Is your Jesus safe and comforting, or is He powerful and terrifying? You cannot have a powerful Jesus who is safe and predictable. He does not exist. If your Jesus is too weak to do you much good, maybe it is because you do not trust Him to take care of you. Maybe you are afraid He will try to guide your life. Maybe you are stuck trying to get through this life on your own pathetic power when Jesus could carry you through with His super-human strength. But let's see some more proof that you can trust Jesus to care for you.

### ***The Super-disease***

The super-storm, the super-demon – next Jesus displays His power over a super-disease and over the ultimate disaster. Jesus and His disciples returned to Galilee in their boat and were greeted by a ruler of the synagogue. Jairus had a daughter who was extremely sick, and he asked Jesus to come and heal her. On the way Jesus was met by a woman who had a terrible disease. She had a hemorrhage, but the problem is it had been going on for 12 years! Can you imagine losing blood steadily for 12 years? Certainly it would drain your energy and make life very difficult. But for a Jew it was far more distressing. The law mandated that such a person was unclean. That meant she was banned from social interaction – especially worship. For 12 years this woman was confined to her house, away from society, her life slowly slipping away. Is it any wonder she came to Jesus? She was insane with desperation! Perhaps she would be arrested for plunging into the crowd, but who cares! If Jesus cannot heal her, death is her next visitor.

Do you see how Jesus treated this poor woman? She should have been home. She had no business on the street, in a crowd. She was justifiably frightened. But Jesus healed her and then comforted her. “Daughter...Go in peace.” He called her daughter! He sent her home in peace! How can you resist this Jesus?

But while Jesus was healing the woman disaster struck! Jairus' daughter died. You can imagine the thoughts and feelings of her father. "My poor daughter! If only Jesus had come faster. If only that wicked woman had not delayed Him. He could have healed her any time, but now my daughter is gone forever. Why? Why did He not *care* for my daughter!"

Has Jesus ever let you down? Come on, be honest. Perhaps you counted on Him to help you make the team, or get a part in a play, or win the love of your heart – or perhaps you counted on Him to heal your aunt or save your parent's marriage. Has Jesus ever let you down? Is that perhaps why you are holding out on Him? You want Him close enough to save you, but not so close that He will disappoint you again?

As soon as he heard the awful news Jairus had a choice: would he give in to his fears, or would he trust Jesus? Jairus believed in Jesus and invited Him to continue to the house. And there Jesus performed the ultimate miracle. He raised Jairus' daughter from the dead. What greater power is there than death? In the book of Ecclesiastes the preacher said, "No one has power to retain, or power over the day of death. There is no discharge from war, nor will wickedness deliver those who are given to it." (Ecclesiastes 8:8) No one has power over death – but Jesus does. Even with all the marvels of modern medicine, we are no closer to raising the dead than the people of Jesus' day. Jesus has ultimate power – power to give life.

### ***Super-unbelief***

But there was one place where Jesus could do no "mighty work" – His hometown. Jesus healed the sick, but by now, that hardly qualifies as a miracle in light of all that has happened recently. Why could Jesus do no mighty work? Because of unbelief. The people in Jesus' hometown did not believe He could cast out demons and raise the dead – so He did not. Is that because Jesus was sore at them and did not want to bless them? No. It is because faith takes you to Jesus, and apart from Him there is no healing. Some people think that faith is a heightened conviction, a charged-up feeling state, but it is not. Faith is simply acting on your trust in Jesus. Did you notice that every single person in these stories came to Jesus with their problems? That is what faith is – it is coming to Jesus with your problems. It is not feeling real tingly about Jesus, or feeling real confident about your beliefs. Faith is leaving your house when it is illegal to do so because Jesus is out there. Faith is calling out to Him anyway when there is no hope of escaping the storm. Faith is taking Him home to see your dead daughter, facing the ridicule of your neighbors.

### ***The Strong***

Is God telling the truth, or is He lying to you? Does Jesus really care for you – even when it seems life is falling apart? Does Jesus really have overwhelming power to do absolutely anything He wants? Will Jesus use that power to love you? Or are these stories all lies? Do not deceive yourself. Either Jesus is your all-powerful savior or He is a fraud. Either Jesus loves you passionately, or He is a dangerous enemy. Either He is calling you into the intimate relationship you are made for, or He is luring you into a deception. Which is it?

On his own man is weak and fearful – Christians and non-Christians alike. Nietzsche, Marx, Jesse, and Dawkins were partly right, but it is not just Christians who are weak – everyone needs a savior. The gospel is that Jesus loves you with a powerful love that will carry you through life and overcome even death. Christ has the strength we need and in Him we are strong. Do not be afraid. Believe in Him. This gospel is really true. Trust Jesus with all of your life.

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