



God With Us

Part 1 – Good News for Those Needing Strength

Scott McElvain

There is a saying that my boss says that I love. It's something he says when we find ourselves in some routines. He says, "Do not let the extraordinary become ordinary." This is a really good thing for us to think about and visit from time to time. I began thinking about some things that I have let happen in this way in my life – extraordinary things that have become ordinary.

One of the first things I think of is I think we are in an extraordinary time for Kansas City sports athletics. Patrick Mahomes seems to be putting us in an extraordinary level of athletics right now. It's funny because my kids, my oldest, Hudson, all he knows is super bowls and championships. It's like, *yeah buddy, but before you were born, there was nothing*. He was born and the Royals won a world series, the Jayhawks won a championship, and the Chiefs won two Super bowls. There was nothing during my time. In fact, I believe the last winning season for the Kansas City Royals was 1986. I was born in 1987. They were horrible.

But we have let the extraordinary become ordinary in that sense. Another place I think we might be falling into this is our deep love and appreciation for what I believe is one of the best restaurants out there – Chick-fil-A. We're about to get a second restaurant. And if you think you took that for granted now, wait until you get two. I remember when we didn't have a Chick-fil-A here in Branson. It was like the spot to go to in any major city. Go get you a number one at Chick-fil-A. But we've now taken the extraordinary and it has become ordinary.

Or how about how well we celebrate the Christmas season here in Branson, Missouri. Those lights seem to be coming up earlier and earlier every year. I'm to the point that I believe when Christmas ends, it's not like we are taking these Christmas lights down, it's just time to replace the bulbs. It is extraordinary how we celebrate that around this town. But in all seriousness, there are two things that I think we can sometimes fall into this trap. The first one being that I think often we take for granted the amazing ministries, organizations, men and women, church leaders, and churches in this area. This is an extraordinary place to live, with extraordinary people doing Kingdom work. And I do not want us to believe that is ordinary.

I bring this quip to you from my boss because I think ultimately, we are in a season that we can so easily let the extraordinary become ordinary. Whether it's the lights or the songs we sing or the decorations we put up or even the passages that we preach from during this season. We can very easily chalk it up as ordinary. I've heard this passage before, I've thought about this concept before. My warning to us all

as we jump into today's message is that you and I would not let the things that we come to and think about every year during this time become ordinary.

Like the story of Jesus being born in the manger. God sending his only son to us is anything but ordinary. It is extraordinary. Not only that, but it is good news for you and me. One of my things, whenever I preach or in my walk with the Lord, that I try to keep at the forefront of my mind is something I heard from Dale Taggett a long time ago. And that is that when we look upon the face of God, we cannot help but be transformed. My hope and prayer for us, as we gather here today, is that we would see Jesus in a new light. And as we do that, we would be transformed. Maybe you've never met Jesus. Maybe you're here, curious to know more about who this Savior being born in a manger is. We all have a picture of God and I ask what is your picture of God? Maybe you have a blank canvas right now. Maybe you have a picture or a painting that has been marred or beat up due to experiences in life and it has jaded your picture of who he is and how he loves us or how he created us. But I do know that my desire is for us to look intently into the scripture and see vividly his face that we might be transformed. We do not want to let the extraordinary become ordinary.

So, today, we are going to cover the idea of Mighty God. We are pulling from this passage in this series from Isaiah 9: 6. Ted spoke on this last week when he preached on Jesus being the Wonderful counselor. Today I get the task of diving into what it means that Jesus is Mighty God. Isaiah 9 - ***For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*** The next two weeks, we will cover those last two, but today, we get the task of thinking about Mighty God.

When I began to sit down and think about my sermon and what to write, I began to plum my experiences to think where do I get a picture of mighty? Where does my idea of strength and power come from. What is it that has shaped my idea of this concept of one being mighty? I was brought to something that I love doing with my dad, something that I enjoyed spending time and doing with him and that was watching movies. My dad was an avid movie watcher. He loved movies. I loved spending time with him, watching whatever film, going to the theaters, buying popcorn. It was a great time. My dad loved movies so much and I have so many great stories about funny things. And one of those great stories that I vividly remember is I was over here at CofO and just played a basketball game. Dad said, "Let's go catch a new movie." We knew we were going to be late. The game went a little bit longer and the movie he wanted to see was 300. Not a movie I recommend, but an historical, fictional depiction of King Leonidas taking on King Xerxes.

We walk into Branson Meadows and my dad walks right up the counter. He says, "I'll take two tickets for 300. The young man responds, "I'm sorry to tell you, Sir, that we are sold out." My dad, without hesitation, he didn't look at me, he didn't contemplate what to do next, he looked up at the movie board and said, "Okay, I'll take two tickets for Amazing Grace." I wanted to see Amazing Grace. I didn't think much of it. If you have not seen the film, I do recommend you go see Amazing Grace, which is a biography about the life of William Wilberforce as a British abolitionist whose efforts were to end the transatlantic slave trade. Great film. We grab our popcorn, hand our ticket to the ticket taker, and without one word, my dad walks right into 300 and sits down. He didn't say anything, he didn't look at me. I'm thinking, Pastor Cray McElvain, the irony of buying tickets to Amazing Grace and walking right into 300. Too good to be true. I loved it. I chuckled inside, we watched the movie.

We didn't even talk about it. My dad was awesome. He loved movies. Part of what fueled our love of movies was that my dad had a friend who worked in a particular industry within movies at that time.

There was a battle back in the day about two competing ways to watch movies. I want to say streaming, but it wasn't streaming. We're talking there was this way of watching movies back in the day called Lazer disks. Now raise your hand if you ever purchased, knew about Lazer disks, or if you had one. Lazer disks lost out to the competitor at the time, VHS tapes. The Lazer disks lost because they were more expensive, VHS were less expensive, they were of a higher quality picture, and ultimately what I think was the killer is that in a Lazer disk, there were two sides, so halfway through the movie, you had to get up off your seat, eject it and flip it over. Well, with VHS tapes, as you know, you did not have to do that. So, Lazer disk lost and when they lost, my dad inherited an 80's collection of all the best Lazer disks. So, I grew up watching all the greats on Lazer disk with my dad. We're talking Star Wars, Jurassic Park, Three Amigos. We're talking about the greats here. But there was one picture, one movie that I ultimately fell in love with. I was in that stage of time where as a kid the answer was again.

My mom and dad would ask me what I wanted to watch again? "I want to watch the Magnificent Seven again." The Magnificent Seven was my absolute favorite movie growing up. And when you think about a classic cowboy movie, it is this. This movie was so good, they recently did a remake and the lead actor was Denzel Washington. That should tell you everything you need to know. I love this movie. Yule Brenner starred as the main character named Chris, and Steve McQueen was his partner in crime. This cowboy movie sets up a classic storyline where there is a village of individuals who are helpless under the rule of these evil bandits. They'd take their food, their money, and the villagers could not fight back. There was nothing they could do.

So, they set out to find gunmen that would come in and protect them. The villagers go out. And in a scene where they get Yule Brenner in a room, Chris, and they plead with him, "Please come save us. We do not have guns, we do not have money, but we need some help. We need somebody to come in and save us." So, Chris gets seven other crazy gunmen together who take on the hundred men that are pillaging this village. They essentially say to Chris, "We need help. We are outdueled. We do not have the guns, the manpower, the money to fix this. Will you come and save us?"

It is this story that reminded me of something I inherently understand as what it means to be mighty. These men ride in with their horses and guns and courage and bravery to defeat the evil bandits. They staved them off, saving the villagers. It is this kind of storyline that came to mind when I thought of what it means to be mighty.

It got me thinking about it. It got me thinking, *Well, for Chris and Vin, Steve McQueen and Yule, for them to show their might, their strength, their power, their bravery, their courage, there needed to be somebody to save.* There needed to be somebody who did not have the power themselves to overturn the unfortunate situation that they had found themselves in. They needed somebody to come in and save them.

And when we read God's Word, it is very clear in our story who are the individuals that need saving. Those are you and me. We are the villagers. We have been wrecked by sin, the bondage of sin. It has

wrecked, destroyed, fractured, blown up all relationships interactions. In the world we live in, sin is pervasive.

Romans 3: 23 says, ***For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*** None of us have the gunpower. None of us have the manpower. None of us have the strength, the cunningness, the wit, the cleverness to out duel that which is sin. Sin not only does this, but it separates us from a holy God. The Lord cannot be present with sin, so we have a chasm, a separation between that and the loving Father. It is devastating.

Not only does it do this, but it also makes us foolish. Ted did a great job last week covering Wonderful Counselor. We often believe what's up is down, what's left is right, what's lies and truth. I am the center of the universe. I sit on the throne. I am foolish.

2 Timothy 4: 3 says, ***For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers that suit their own passions.***

I am the Assistant Principal at School of the Ozarks and I handle the discipline, which means I have so much sermon illustration it is crazy. One of the things that I often think about is young boys and girls. I primarily look over the K – 8. And often, when junior high kids are sent to my office, a conversation has often gone like this.

“Tell me what you did. Tell me why the teacher would send you to my office. Okay, thank you for explaining that. Now, tell me what made you do that? What motivated you to do that? What was in your heart that led to the action that you chose that got you sent to my office?” It's a matter of the heart.

Often, Junior high students will say things like this: “Well, you know, I was thinking about what to do and I went to my classmate and asked their advice of what I should do.”

I look at them so straight faced. “Okay.” And whenever they say this, I follow up with a question that already... As you can imagine, they are sweating in my office, they know they're in trouble. But I hit them with this question and it totally gives them with a curve ball.

I say, “Can I ask you a question about the person you asked advice from?”

‘Yeah, absolutely.’

Do they do their own laundry?

“What?”

“Do you know if they fold their socks and put them away?”

You can just see it. Their world is spinning right now. They have no idea what's going on.

Then I say, "Well, do you do your laundry?"

"No."

"Do you fold your socks?"

"Do you put the away?"

"No."

"So let me get this straight. In the middle of a sticky situation where you find yourself at odds, needing advice with how to move forward in your situation, you chose to go find an individual who doesn't do their own laundry, fold their own socks, and put them away, and ask them the best way that they would handle this situation, is that correct?"

"Yeah, now that you put it like that, it's maybe not the best decision I could have made."

"You're right young man. You're right young woman. There are mature, wise, god-fearing individuals in this building, not to even exclude your parents who would have given you great advice with how to deal with this."

We often make the mistake that we know better, and I am part there to help them grow in that maturity and wisdom and to tell them, "Asking for life advice from somebody who doesn't do their own laundry is not a good pathway here."

We are foolish. Sin makes us fools. Not only that, but we are also weak.

We are weak. We do not have that power to overcome sin, the problem of sin. We have, again, never outworked it, outmuscled it, outgunned it. We are not strong enough. And, unfortunately, due to this problem, there is a punishment, a penalty for that sin.

Romans 6: 23 puts it this way. ***For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.***

The problem is large for you and I. nobody has escaped it. From the garden with Adam and Eve we have been fractured and broken. Sin is pervasive and it presents a large problem. And in the midst of a large problem, we need a large answer. Putting it another way, we need a hero. We need a hero to come and save us. We need somebody to jump down, to rescue us from ourselves.

I love how one advent devotional put it when it said, "The names we talked about in Isaiah 9:6 are exactly what every sinner needs. We are in need of a Wonderful Counselor, someone who gives freely truth and wisdom. We are in need of a Mighty God because we are weak. We do not have what it takes to overcome."

You might be saying, “Okay, Scott, you’ve made the case that we have a problem. And, yes, you say that Jesus is mighty, but I don’t see evidence of it yet. I don’t feel it yet.”

What if we were to check his resume? If we were to take a look at his CV. What if we were to look at how he lived his life and what he did. And as I run through these points, I want to make it very clear that I am picking a random swath of what Jesus did in his lifetime. This is not an exhaustive list of his show of strength and might. But let’s talk about it.

Jesus – John 1: 3 says, ***All things were made through him in creation. And without him, was not anything made that was not made.***

Jesus was a part of creation. Jesus the creator – Colossians 1: 16 – ***for by him, all things were created. In heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions, rulers or authorities, all things were created through him and for him.*** Quite a testament to strength and mite.

What about his power over creation? One of my favorite passages comes from Matthew 8: 26 – 27. To set the scene, Jesus is in a boat with his disciples, veteran, seasoned fishermen. A storm comes upon them so heavy, they begin to fear for their life. Jesus is asleep and they wake him. He gets up and he rebukes the winds and the seas and it was perfectly calm. Verse 27 – ***the men were amazed and asked, “What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the sea obey him.***

Jesus turns water into wine, walks on water, his demonstration and mite over creation is evident. What about the miracles. What about when he healed the blind? He healed the lame. The lepers. Individuals touched his coat and things happened. What about when Jesus feeds the 5,000, breaking five pieces of bread and two fish, feeding those listening to him teach.

The crescendo of his resume – to exert and demonstrate his power, he defeats sin and death. Jesus vanquished death. Satan probably believed that he had won, seeing as he had figured out a way to put Jesus on a cross for crimes he did not commit. Nailed to the cross, bleeding, broken, whipped, Jesus dies. Satan thinks he has won. Satan is surprised, loss for words when Jesus rises from the grave three days later on Sunday. The trumpets blare, the horns erupt. Jesus is alive.

I love how one commentary put it. Jesus, in essence, became the death of death. Defeating death. Not only did he do this, but he then provides a way for us to be redeemed from sin, a problem which all of us have to deal with. He accomplished this remarkable feat of redeeming humanity from sin through his death. His blood was the sacrifice we needed. That if we believe in our heart and confess with our mouth that Jesus is Lord, he would bestow upon us the free gift of salvation. The sacrificial Lamb that covers our sins. He saves us from our sins. That which we have chosen to put ourselves on the thrown rather than Christ.

I think about this because I recently had a conversation with a kindergartener. He came into my office because the teacher sent him in from recess. In this conversation, I sat him down and I said, “Young man, tell me what happened.”

“Well, I punched somebody on the playground.”

“Oh, no. What happened? What made you do that?”

“Well, Dr. Mac, Satan told me to do it.”

“What?”

“Yeah, Dr. Mac, Satan made me do it.”

At that point, I just sent him back to class. I said, “Teacher, good luck with this guy.” No. I sat down with him and walked through it with him. Yes, there is evil out there. There is someone who is looking to steal, kill, and destroy, the ultimate liar. One who tempts us. That sin is us, in our heart.

Why does Jesus do this? Why does Jesus, born in a manger, live a spotless, sinless life willingly walk to the cross to be nailed there. There is no other way to put it other than he loves us.

Romans 5: 8, ***But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us***, taking on all past, present, and future sin upon his shoulders. He loves us enough.

Max Lucado writes this and I implore you to listen to this. He writes this. “If God is able to place the stars in their sockets and suspend the sky like a curtain, do you think it remotely possible that God is able to guide your life?”

If your God is mighty enough to ignite the sun, could it be that he is mighty enough to light your path. If he cares enough about the planet Saturn to give it rings, or Venus to make it sparkle, is there an outside chance that he cares enough about you to meet your needs?

I hear that song that I sang with my parents that I now love singing with my own kids. As a quick side note, parents, if you're in that stage with young kids, sing with them every night. It is one of my favorite things to do. It is hiding God's word in their heart. It is demonstrating that you pause all things to stop and worship him. Sing with them!

Jesus loves me. I love that song. *“Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so. Little ones to him belong. They are weak, but he is strong. Yes Jesus loves me. Yes, Jesus loves me.”* The idea that the Lord would put rings around Saturn, that he would light the sky. He loves me enough that he cares about where I'm at. The places I find I am weakened... I don't know what that looks like for you. I don't know where you might feel weak right now or feel like you are helpless or out dueled or outnumbered. Maybe you've not accepted Christ and today you hear a message where there is a mighty God who loves you enough to be the answer to that problem of sin in your heart and in your life. The good news is for you and me here. Our God is mighty to save. He is mighty to save in situations where we feel there is no hope. Maybe your marriage is in that place. There is no hope for reconciliation. Jesus is there waiting to bestow his power to you, to strengthen you. Maybe you're in that place where, “I am beaten, I'm broken, I don't know if I have the strength to walk through the tragedy that life has thrown my way.” The surprise, the curve ball you've thrown this year. The thing that sits upon your heart that you're thinking about right now. Does the Lord care? Is he in this with me? Yes. He is.

Ephesians 1: 18 says You should be encouraged. This is a prayer that Paul is saying to those believers in Ephesus. And I think it is well worth our time to listen to this word. He says this. ***I pray the eyes of your heart would be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people.*** Verse 19 – ***In his Incomparably great power, for us who believe. That power is the same power as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at the right hand of the heavenly realms.***

Let me summarize that for you quickly. Paul is praying for those in Ephesus that they would know they have the same power welcome and open to them that raised Christ from the dead.

I read Isaiah 9:6 to my junior high students this week in preparation, a little mini walkthrough. Junior high students are a tough crowd, right? You have to do some crazy stuff to get their attention. I'm reading Isaiah 9:6 and after I read it. I go "Did you hear that!" I think they thought somebody was in trouble. Their eyes pop out, their head jumps up. Did you hear the prophecy about Jesus, the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Prince of Peace, Everlasting Father. Those words are life changing words. That prophecy is hope giving. That prophecy is power igniting in you and I who accept Jesus as our lord and savior. Do not become weary to it. Do not forget how it changes lives. What Christ has done. the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is welcome and open to you and me.

Ephesians 3: 14 -16 says, ***14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family[c] in heaven and on earth is named, 16 that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being...*** The Holy Spirit provides us this power. Through him, we are given the same power that raised Christ from the dead.

I finish with this. My encouragement to you today is to put your trust in him. Cast your troubles constantly upon him. Bring your dilemmas to his feet, your griefs to his ear, your backsliding sin confess before him. He, the mighty, vigorous, hero champion. We must write in on our banner today and forever more. This message, this good news that he is the mighty God. It would be our joy and song to write such and live in this reality. He is the Mighty God.

I finish with where we began. Do not let the extraordinary become the ordinary. Do not forget he loves you. He has given us the ability to be right with sin and he strengthens us through the Holy Spirit that we may walk through the trials and tribulations of this life.

Father, we thank you that you are mighty, for I confess I am not. I come before you saying, right here, right now, that there are places in my life that I still feel weak. The bondage to set sin, the devastating news, relationships. That are in the midst of my life right now. May I lean on you, may I ask, and may I live in the reality that you bestow through the Holy Spirit's strength through us today.

We love you and we thank you and we praise you. It's in your name we pray, and all God's people said... Amen.