

## Gospel of Matthew Chapter 12 -- John Karmelich

1. I like to call Chapter 12: “The danger of religious tradition”.
  - a) Chapter 12 is a milestone in the Gospel of Matthew.
    - i) It marks the time period where the Nation of Israel corporately rejects Jesus.
    - ii) From Chapter 13 and onward, Jesus speaks publicly in parables. We’ll learn in Chapter 13 the reason Jesus does this is to hide the truth from unbelievers.
  - b) The overriding theme of Chapter 12 has to do with the problem of religious traditions.
    - i) This is the danger of *one* bible interpretation being the *only* correct interpretation.
    - ii) This includes the danger of emphasizing one aspect of the bible over another.
      - a) For example, we’re going to see today about the religious leaders of Israel emphasizing Sabbath rules over the idea of compassion.
      - b) The “Sabbath” is the 7<sup>th</sup> day of the week, where God requires us to “rest”.
    - iii) The danger comes from bad-bible interpretation.
      - a) There is nothing wrong with attempting to interpret the bible.
      - b) I do some of that myself. ☺
      - c) One has to remember to read passages in context, read passages in light of what the rest of the bible teaches and then attempt to interpret meaning.
    - iv) Given all this, there are some biblical passages can have more than meaning.
      - a) In those situations, we have to be open to the possibility that we can be wrong. Yes, even me. ☺
      - b) The Jewish religious leaders got so obsessed with their interpretation of “resting on the Sabbath”, that the issue became a priority over other biblical based issues.- 2. At this point, I need to stand-back for a second and remember the purpose of these bible studies.
  - a) The primary purpose of these studies is to teach about Jesus and how He wants us to live our lives in obedience to Him.
  - b) I could spend half of this lesson talking about the historical aspects of Judaism and how they interpreted the laws of the Sabbath, and then how Jesus corrected them.
  - c) Because of the “primary purpose”, I want to give examples in the *Christian* church of how we can also (and have historically) become more obsessed with bad interpretation.
  - d) When one reads say, an Old Testament passage and is not sure how to apply it to our lives, a good place to start is to see if Jesus commented on that passage. We have some of that here today. It’s a good thing, and it makes my job easier. ☺
  - e) What I want you, the reader to think about when you read Chapter 12 is not, “we’ll, look at those naïve Jewish Pharisee’s. They didn’t get it.” Instead, think about your own life, or your own church and ponder, “Is there any aspect of my life where I am putting religious traditions over what God is trying to teach me?”
    - i) That is the great mistake we read about in Chapter 12. Israel rejected Jesus corporately (i.e., as a collective group) because he did not fit their preconceived notions of what the “Messiah” was supposed to be.
    - ii) We as Christians often make the same mistake. We have our preconceived notions that “Christians should do this and not do that”. Folks, every now and then it is good to spend some time in a bible-believing Christian church that is not your home church. I am not talking about violating biblical principals, but to realize there is more than one way to worship God, and more than one way to live in obedience to what God has called us to do.
    - iii) The mistake made by the Pharisee’s is they “majored in the minors and minored in the majors”. They became overly obsessed with some issues of the bible and ignored others. That is also the danger for Christians as well.

- f) Well, I have 50 verses to cover tonight. I better get started. ☺
3. Chapter 12, Verse 1: At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some heads of grain and eat them. <sup>2</sup> When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, "Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath."
- a) Chapter 11 was all about the disciples traveling from town to town around the Galilee lake area. They went as "front-men" to prepare for Jesus.
- i) It had a section about the disciples of John the Baptist coming to Jesus to find out if he was really "the guy". Jesus gave these guys a reminder of who Jesus was. It was a mild rebuke for their lack of belief.
- a) Jesus then complimented John the Baptist to the surrounding crowd.
- ii) It is implied that Jesus went to those same towns the disciples just came back from and was rejected. His miracles were accepted, but not the idea of Jesus being the Messiah. Jesus then went on to condemn those towns for their rejection.
- iii) The final section was Jesus complimenting those who did decide to follow him.
- b) Chapter 12 appears to change topics.
- i) Remember that in the original text, there are no chapter breaks. This "spot" is a natural chapter break as the topic does change.
- c) The Pharisee's were a "denomination" of Judaism. They were a group of religious Jews who believed in a strict, literal interpretation of the Jewish law.
- i) Their version of Judaism is the basis of the Orthodox faith today.
- ii) In this section of the text, they were condemning Jesus' disciples for eating wheat on the Sabbath. The Sabbath is simply the 7<sup>th</sup> day of the week. In the Jewish calendar, this today has become Saturday.
- a) By the way, the 2 words "Saturday" and "Sabbath" are not related.
- iii) The last of the 10 commandments in Exodus Chapter 20 is about the Sabbath.
- a) Part of the commandment is that no work is to be done on the 7<sup>th</sup> day.
- b) Here were Jesus disciples walking through a grain field, picking out some wheat husks, separating the grain and eating them.
- c) The roads from town to town often went past grain fields. This was an agricultural society. It is not against Jewish law to eat on the Sabbath.
- d) The "interpretation" by the Jewish leaders is that they violated the "no working on the Sabbath" clause by breaking up the wheat in order to eat it.
- d) One thing I pondered is, "How did the Pharisee's know these guys were doing this?"
- i) The disciples were in a grain field. They were on the road from town to town.
- ii) If the Pharisees were not violating the Sabbath themselves, what were they doing "in the middle of nowhere" watching the disciples? One of their own Sabbath rules was they could only walk so far on the Sabbath day.
- iii) I was also thinking, "Of all the things to complain out, the Pharisee's were really straining to find *something* of which to make an accusation against Jesus."
- a) Let's face it; they couldn't accuse Jesus of stealing or some sort of adulterous relationship. The worst they could come up with is that he was technically violating their interpretation of the Sabbath by eating wheat.
- b) It would like us saying, "exercise is illegal on Sunday, and peeling a banana is considered exercise".
- c) My point is that they were looking for something to accuse Jesus of. If it weren't the "wheat" incident, they would have found something else.
- iv) The application to you and I is that the "church police" are everywhere. ☺
- a) There are those out there who want to enforce the church rules. They are so busy being the "church police". They go from place to place making sure everybody is following the rules, that they violate the biblical concepts of love and compassion in order to be the enforcer.

4. Verse 3: He (Jesus) answered, "Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? <sup>4</sup> He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread—which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests. <sup>5</sup> Or haven't you read in the Law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple desecrate the day and yet are innocent? <sup>6</sup> I tell you that one greater than the temple is here. <sup>7</sup> If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent.
- a) The first thing to notice is how Jesus responded. He used Old Testament Scripture.
- i) When the religious zealot “enforcers” of the world come to you and say how you are not obeying one of the rules, calmly respond with God’s word.
  - ii) In other words, Jesus did not yell out “What are you, a bunch of idiots? These guys are working for me, their hungry, and you’re complaining because they are opening the husks to eat the grain. I suppose you would be complaining if they peeled a banana in order to eat the inside. Now get lost! “
  - iii) The Pharisee’s believed in God’s word. The mistake is they focused on one passage with greater zeal than another passage.
  - iv) Jesus pointed out other passages in the bible where King David “violated” the Sabbath in order to eat the bread designated for the priest. (1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 21:1-6)
  - v) In Verse 5, Jesus pointed out that the Levitical priests also “violated” the Sabbath by changing the bread every Sabbath (Leviticus 24) and further they offered burnt sacrifices on the Sabbath (Numbers 28:9-10).
- b) Jesus sums up this whole section with the term “I desire mercy, not sacrifice”.
- i) This is a quote of the first half of Hosea 6:6.
  - ii) First, let's talk about sacrifice. Sacrifice is to give up something for someone else.
    - a) This is the biblical concept behind “love”. It is the idea of giving up one’s desires in order to please someone else’s desires.
    - b) In a nutshell, it is a good thing. ☺
    - c) The danger is our egos. Our ego likes to pat ourselves on the back and say, “Nice job. Boy, God loves you for what you just did. You are now so much better than others because you made that sacrifice”.
  - iii) You can see where I’m going with this. ☺ the danger is when one sacrifices for God at the expense of not being compassionate to others.
    - a) Here are some illustrations.
      - (1) “No, I can’t help you move that box. This is my prayer time and I need to go pray right now.”
      - (2) “If you guys were spiritual like me, you would be skipping that meal and joining me in my fast.”
      - (3) “No I can’t have dinner with you. God told me to separate myself from sinners and to have a meal with you would be associating with the ungodly. But, hey, don’t take it personal. ☺”
    - b) Folks, Jesus is teaching balance. Yes there are times as Christians we need to separate ourselves from the world in order to draw on God’s strength. But we can’t ignore compassion at the expense of our religion.
    - c) I believe Jesus is implying here, “Given a choice between doing something compassionate for others versus doing something sacrificial for God, do the compassionate thing first. You people are my witnesses to the world. That takes priority over your “religious” acts. Be a witness first and then worry about the sacrificial acts.”

5. Verse 8: For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."
- a) Something we forget that Jesus is God.
  - b) All things were created by Jesus (see Colossians, 1:16). That means he made the Sabbath.
  - c) Don't miss the importance of this statement. Jesus is claiming here to be God.
  - d) To be "Lord of the Sabbath" is to say, "I'm in charge of the Sabbath and I make the rules".
  - e) This leads to the great bible question, "What about Christians and the Sabbath?"
    - i) Since I've got 50 verses to cover tonight, I won't give you a detailed answer. ☺
    - ii) Since Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath, we as non-Jewish Christians need to look at what He says as the answer. Further, we can study the Book of Acts and the Epistles and see what they said about the church and the Sabbath.
    - iii) My favorite verse on this topic is Romans 14:15:
      - a) "Some think that Christians should observe the Jewish holidays as special days to worship God, but others say it is wrong and foolish to go to all that trouble, for every day alike belongs to God. On questions of this kind everyone must decide for himself." Romans 14:5, The Living Bible
      - b) What Paul is saying is there are a number of ways that a Christian can observe "The Sabbath" if he chooses. Pick a "biblical" way that is right for you, and don't worry about how other Christians are doing it!
6. Verse 9: Going on from that place, he (Jesus) went into their synagogue,<sup>10</sup> and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"<sup>11</sup> He said to them, "If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out?"<sup>12</sup> How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."<sup>13</sup> Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." So he stretched it out and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other.
- a) Here was Jesus walking into a synagogue. Among the audience were a lot of Pharisee's and a man with a shriveled hand.
  - b) The Pharisee's understood that Jesus had the power of a miracle-worker.
  - c) The Pharisee's believe that Jesus was violating the "no-work-on-the-Sabbath" clause by using his powers to heal.
    - i) Technically, they didn't have a problem with Jesus healing people, but they couldn't stand the fact that he "dared" to heal on the Sabbath.
    - ii) This goes back to my opening remarks how people can get so obsessed with one section of the bible at the expense of other areas of the bible.
    - iii) They were ignoring the concept behind, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice".
      - a) To obey the Sabbath was to "sacrifice" your desires and rest in God.
      - b) To not be compassionate in order to "be more holy" is the mistake.
  - d) Let's talk about the "sheep" reference. Jesus says that if a sheep of a Pharisee falls into a pit on the Sabbath, it is ok to pull them out. Jesus is accusing them of having more compassion for a sheep than for a person who is hurting.
    - i) The Jewish "official" commentary on the Old Testament is a collective works called the Talmud. Jews revered this book, but still consider it man-inspired. Much of it is good commentary, but some of it is contradictory. One section had a reference that it is not a violation to help "one sheep, but no more than one sheep".
      - a) "Pharisees would lift an animal out of a pit on the Sabbath--though the most that was allowed at Qumran was to do something that would enable the animal to help itself (CD 11:13-14)." Bible Expositor's Encyclopedia.
    - ii) My point is that Jesus was aware of their interpretation and used that point against them.
    - iii) The Pharisee's had more compassion for an animal than for a human.

- e) Notice in Verse 13, Jesus tells the man with the withered hand to “stretch it out”.
    - i) That is like telling a crippled person to stand up or a blind man to “read this”.
    - ii) Give the withered-hand-man some credit. He knows that to obey Jesus was a violation of the religious leaders interpretation of the Sabbath. In his mind, he must have pondered, “Do I obey my religious leaders, or do I obey Jesus? If I obey the religious leaders, my bad hand will not be cured. I’ll take Jesus, even if it means me being kicked out of the synagogue. OK, Jesus, I’m stretching!”
      - a) One can have a field day doing sermons on this one. ☺
      - b) Sometimes one has to turn their back on their preconceived religious beliefs in order to accept Jesus. Jesus who wants to heal you and make you whole, also says, “The price you must pay is to turn away from you thought was religious truth. Follow me!”
7. Verse 14: But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus.
- a) Notice what the Pharisees did not say,
    - i) “Well, we were wrong about the Sabbath. Maybe we need to rethink it out.”
    - ii) “Well, praise the Lord for this wonderful miracle done right here in our presence.”
    - iii) Don’t expect the world to react positively to your acceptance of Jesus.
    - iv) Beware of “The tyranny of the status quo”. People get accustomed to power and prestige. They won’t give that up even if they are wrong in their beliefs.
  - b) People get set in their ways. The Pharisees spent their *lifetime* studying the Old Testament, and nobody was going to tell them their interpretation was wrong.
    - i) I have seen churches react like this. Take an issue like “speaking in tongues”.
      - a) Some Christians believe it is a spiritual gift. Others believe it is demonic. Others believe you are not “really” saved unless you have this gift. I have heard of Christians kicked out of churches because they have this gift. I know of a great pastor who was asked to leave a seminary because he believed in this gift. Some Christians refuse to “think outside the box” of their interpretation.
8. Verse 15: Aware of this, Jesus withdrew from that place. Many followed him, and he healed all their sick, <sup>16</sup> warning them not to tell who he was.
- a) Chapter 12 is the turning point where Jesus is corporately rejected. The last set of verses is part of that corporate rejection.
  - b) Notice that when Jesus left the synagogue, many choose to follow Jesus.
    - i) Don’t take that lightly. That meant being ex-communicated by from their synagogue. Imagine being kicked out of *your* church and having all of your old friends shun you as if you never existed. Imagine giving *that* up to follow Jesus.
    - ii) Notice the positive side of those who left: “and he (Jesus) healed all their sick.
    - iii) Yes, to be a disciple means to give up all that you have. The positive is that we are eternally cured of all our sins. All sickness-cures over/above that is a bonus!
  - c) We read many times in the bible where Jesus tells people to “be quiet” about miracles.
    - i) Jesus can’t teach if crowds are thronging around him trying to get cured.
9. Verse 17: This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: <sup>18</sup> "Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations. <sup>19</sup> He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets. <sup>20</sup> A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he leads justice to victory. <sup>21</sup> In his name the nations will put their hope."
- a) Verses 18-21 are a quote from Isaiah 42: 1:4.
  - b) The important question to ask is why did Matthew quote Isaiah at this point?
    - i) Verse 17 says Jesus did “this” to fulfill what was written in Isaiah 42: 1:4.

- c) Remember the purpose of the Gospel of Matthew is to present Jesus as the Messiah.
    - i) More than any other Gospel, Matthew quotes the Old Testament to show how Jesus fulfills prophecy predictions about the coming Messiah.
  - d) So how does this Isaiah passage fit in with what Jesus just did?
    - i) First of all, I don't believe Jesus got into a "yelling match" with the Pharisee's.
    - ii) I believe Jesus calmly gave his position, healed the man, and walked out.
    - iii) My support-text is Verse 19. It says, "He will not quarrel or cry out "
      - a) Also, in Verse 20 it says, "A bruised reed he will not break". That means the Messiah will not break in two a bruised reed. It means the Messiah will not be a man of violence when he comes. (Note that the second coming of Jesus is much different.)
    - iv) Here is something else I pondered. Remember that Matthew was a tax collector. That means he was considered a traitor among his own people.
      - a) I suspect Matthew was used to people calling him names behind his back and throwing insults at him.
      - b) He probably saw Jesus being insulted & thought, "Welcome to my world".
      - c) Further, I suspect Matthew was impressed with Jesus' ability to stay calm and have the upper hand in the arguments. That may have been the reason why Matthew quoted "He will not quarrel or cry out".
  - e) This quote of Isaiah has two mentions of Jesus being a leader of the "nations".
    - i) Other translations say "Gentiles". It refers to non-Jews.
    - ii) It must have been a shock to the Jewish audience that Jesus was also the king (i.e., "Messiah") over the Gentiles.
    - iii) Jews understood that the Messiah would rule one day from Jerusalem, but they believed that the idea of the Messiah (king) ruling over the Gentiles would be that of force. The common idea was that the Messiah would "conquer" the Gentiles and rule and the land.
      - a) Matthew was introducing a new idea that Gentiles willfully choose to follow Jesus, as the Jewish corporate leadership is rejecting him.
10. Verse 22: Then they brought him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see. <sup>23</sup>All the people were astonished and said, "Could this be the Son of David?"
- a) In Jewish tradition, there is a ritual for casting out demons. That ritual finding out the demon's name, and then pray to God to specifically remove that demon by name.
  - b) The problem here is that this person was mute. Therefore, the Jewish leaders could not cure this man because the man could not state the name of the demon.
  - c) Therefore, the crowd was all the more astonished by the miracle because Jesus just did something that no Jewish exorcist could have done.
  - d) It is also important to see these two verses in context of the past scene.
    - i) Some few verses back, Jesus was in a synagogue and cured a man with a withered hand.
    - ii) The Jewish leaders rejected Jesus.
    - iii) Jesus left the synagogue and some people left with him. They willfully choose to disobey the authority of their leaders to follow Jesus.
    - iv) Now they see even a greater miracle than the one performed in the synagogue.
    - v) I notice two purposes of this miracle:
      - a) One is going to show the hard-heartedness of the Pharisee's as indicated in the upcoming verses.
      - b) To you and I, it is another demonstration that when you commit your life to Jesus, we see "greater things" as we grow in our faith.

- c) This verse popped in my head which relates to this idea:
    - (1) “Jesus said, “You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that.” (John 1:50 NIV)
    - (2) I’m taking the “John 1:50” verse a little out of context, but as I have lived my life for Jesus I continue to see “greater and greater things” as I grow in my comprehension of God, his redemptive plan for mankind and for my life.
- 11. Verse 24: But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, "It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons."
  - a) OK, first of all, who is this Beelzebub character?
    - i) The word is taken from a local pagan god. It means “lord of the house” in a demonic sense. It is a reference to Satan himself in the context of Satan being the chief among all the demons.
    - ii) I have also heard this term translated as “lord of the flies”; the concept is the same.
  - b) The Pharisee’s are accusing Jesus of using demonic power to cast out demons.
  - c) Of all the miracles in the gospels, have you ever stopped and wondered why so many of them involved casting out demons?
    - i) Let’s face it; in our American society we don’t see many demon-possessed people. There may be more out there than we realize, but it is not something a doctor or a psychologist can diagnose like a broken bone or a case of depression.
    - ii) I’ve personally wondered how “the average Jew” knew somebody was demon possessed as opposed to just mentally deranged?
      - a) It makes you wonder about people who are deranged and if demon possession is a possibility.
      - b) Personally, I don’t believe demon possession is a common phenomenon in the United States because people pray to God too much around here.
      - c) I personally believe it is more common in third-world countries, but it is just my opinion.
      - d) Also, remember that Luke’s gospel also mentions a number of cases of demon possession. Luke was a trained physician. It makes you wonder how he diagnosed or recognized demon possession as opposed to some other medical explanation.
      - e) The Roman Catholic church, in medieval times, set up a list-of questions to test whether someone is demon-possessed or not. In summary, you rule out all other logical possibilities first, and then try exorcism.
        - (1) This methodology is still used by Catholic priests to this day.
    - iii) Let’s get back to my question, “Why are so many of Jesus miracles’ involved in casting out demons?
      - a) Remember the purpose of the Gospel of Matthew: To show Jesus as the Messiah.
      - b) If Jesus did not perform any demonic healings, then the accusation of “Jesus is using demonic powers to heal people” has some validity.
      - c) By Jesus casting out demons, he is eliminating another “logical speculation” of how Jesus could perform his miracles.
      - d) The correct answer is Jesus is God, and God the Father gave Jesus the power to perform these miracles. A big part of all four gospels is to show by example, the evidence of Jesus as the Messiah and Jesus as God.
        - (1) To cast out demons is to show Jesus power is not demonic as he has power over demons.

12. Verse 25: Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand. <sup>26</sup> If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand?
- a) In Verse 25, Jesus gives his defense against the accusation of using demonic power to cast out demons. Jesus is using "logical reasoning" to defeat their arguments.
  - b) Jesus is saying in effect, "Look guys, if I'm using demonic power to eliminate demons, then I am working against myself. How am I helping Satan's goal-to-win if I'm eliminating the demons who are working for him?"
13. Verse 27: And if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your people drive them out? So then, they will be your judges.
- a) Remember that God gave some Jews the power of exorcism.
    - i) He is saying "Well, if you accuse me of driving out demons by Satanic power, what about the Jews who are also given the power to do exorcism? What "power" do *they* use?
  - b) The King James/New American have a different translation that could affect what Jesus is trying to say:
    - i) Instead of saying "your people", it says "your sons"
      - a) "And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out?" (Matthew 12:27a, NKJV)
    - ii) Notice the last sentence of Verse 27 says, "So then, they will be your judges."
    - iii) Using the alternative translation, Jesus may be pointing to his disciples.
    - iv) Remember that Jesus gave the "12" the power to cast out demons. (Mark 3:15)
    - v) Jesus also told his disciples that one day they will judge the "12 tribes of Israel":
      - a) "Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." (Matthew 19:28, NIV)
    - vi) My whole point of this is that when Jesus said "your sons will judge you" for accusing Jesus of casting out demons, he may be referring to his disciples having the power to cast out demons and his disciples being in charge of judging those Jews who refused to believe in Jesus.
14. Verse 28: But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.
- a) This verse is additional support for the validity of Jesus' claims as the Son of God.
  - b) Jesus is saying in effect, "Look, if God The Father himself has given me this power to cast out demons, then you should believe me when I say I have been sent by God the Father".
15. Verse 29: "Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can rob his house.
- a) Verse 29 is another illustration of the same point:
    - i) The point is how could Jesus cast out demons if he is working with the chief demon (Satan himself)? That would be defeating his purpose.
  - b) Let me paraphrase Jesus illustration, "If I wanted to rob a house, and there was a strong guard, how can I "rob" unless I tie the guard up first? In order for me to rob the house I have to be more powerful than the guard, or I couldn't rob the place. Using that illustration, how can I cast out demons unless I was more powerful than any demon?"
16. Verse 30: "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters.
- a) Jesus ends this illustration with a strong point: There is no neutral ground with Jesus.
    - i) Either you are working *for* Jesus or you are against him.
    - ii) Those who ignore Jesus or don't do much with their life for God are working against Jesus and his redemptive plan for our lives.



17. Verse 31: And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.<sup>32</sup> Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.
- a) These two verses are known as the “Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit” verses.
    - i) This is considered the only unforgivable sin in the bible.
    - ii) Notice what is forgivable: Adultery, murder, and everything else that are part of the 10 commandments.
      - a) One has to remember the concept of forgiveness. It is up to the person who is “hurt” to forgive you, not the person asking for forgiveness.
      - b) If you murder someone, the bible does call for the death penalty.
      - c) For the sake of society, murder must not be tolerated.
      - d) As for God, He is perfect in love and perfect in forgiveness by definition.
      - e) In that sense you can ask God for forgiveness for any sin. You must still pay the price to society, but God can and does forgive of any sin.
    - iii) The only exception is “Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit”.
      - a) This is the continual, habitual denial of Jesus as God all of your life.
      - b) If you are reading this study, you are not guilty of this crime.
      - c) If you have ever felt convicted by a sin and turned to God for forgiveness, or desire to turn to God for forgiveness, you have never been guilty of “Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit”
  - b) Remember one of the purposes of the Holy Spirit is to draw people to God.
    - i) To claim “Jesus is of the devil” is blasphemy of the Holy Spirit.
    - ii) It makes sense that this is the only unforgivable sin.
      - a) God forgives us of all our sins if and when we confess them to Him.
      - b) If we deny Jesus as God, how then can we confess our sins to Him?
      - c) If we deny Jesus paid the price for our sins, how can God forgive us?
  - c) In a broader sense, all people condemned to hell who *are* aware of Jesus have committed blasphemy of the Holy Spirit.
    - i) God judges people fairly based on what information we know or what information is readily available to us.
    - ii) In the modern American world of information, there are no excuses for any rational adult.
    - iii) To spend one’s adult lifetime in willful ignorance of what Jesus has done for you and not turn your life over to Jesus is blasphemy of the Holy Spirit.
    - iv) Does this mean there is a point where it is “too late” for a person?
      - a) I can’t answer that question because I can’t read people’s thoughts.
      - b) We have all seen people who are “stubborn and set in their ways”. I do believe a person can get to a point where there is a “point of no return”. Only God himself knows that point. I don’t, so I pray for people! ☺
18. Verse 33: "Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit.
- a) How do you know if a tree is an orange tree or an apple tree?
    - i) The obvious answer is to look at the fruit.
    - ii) Jesus is using this people-as-fruit-trees illustration to make a point about people:
    - iii) How does one know if they are a follower of Jesus? Look at their “fruit”
      - a) Are they “proclaiming” Jesus and doing the things He commands us to do in the Bible or are they denying Jesus as God?

19. Verse 34: You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.
- a) Don't miss the insult "brood of vipers"
    - i) John the Baptist used the same insult when the Pharisee's visited him (Matt. 3:7)
    - ii) Remember that Satan's punishment for the Adam-and-Eve scandal was to be "cast on his belly". Somehow, he is on the ground like a snake.
    - iii) For a Jew to call someone "brood of vipers" is to call them a "group of snakes".
    - iv) It is an insult and comparing their remarks as being demonic.
  - b) Satan himself understands Jesus as God. Satan's goal was that He wanted to be like God and for people to not follow Jesus. (See Isaiah 14:13-14).
  - c) To deny Jesus as God is simply to insult the authority given to Jesus.
  - d) When men make a statement, "Jesus cast out demons by demonic power" is to speak evil. That is the accusation Jesus is making here. He is saying their words are satanic in origin.
20. Verse 35: The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. <sup>36</sup> But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. <sup>37</sup> For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned."
- a) In order to understand these verses, first, we need to talk about eternal judgment.
  - b) There are two resurrections mentioned in the bible:
    - i) There is a 1,000-year period in the bible called the millennium. Those who believe in Jesus will be resurrected prior to this 1,000-year period.
      - a) During this time, Jesus rules from earth. This period happens right after the 7-year tribulation. Those non-believers who survive the tribulation repopulate the earth. They are the ones we rule and reign "over".
      - b) "They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended). This is the first resurrection (*before the 1,000 year period*). Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years. (Revelation 20: 4b-6, NIV)
    - ii) At the end of the 1,000-year period, everyone else is resurrected and judged.
      - a) "And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books." (Revelation 20:12, NIV)
      - b) Now compare that to what Jesus says in Matthew, Verse 36: "But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken."
      - c) Personally, I thank God I will not be part of that judgment!
      - d) When I think of all the "careless words" I have spoken, it makes me all the more grateful that Jesus paid the price for my sins.
  - c) It sort of amazes me that people want to be judged eternally based on their good deeds.
    - i) If you took a survey of most people and asked if they believe they are going to heaven, they will say yes. If you ask why, they will say, "well, I'm basically a good person and my good deeds outweigh my bad deeds".
      - a) The first problem with that argument is "How do you know if you are good enough for God? How do you know God's standards if you are basing it on your good deeds outweighing your bad deeds?"
      - b) I'm speculating, but I do believe "God grants them their request" and judges them fairly based on their deeds. I believe those who spend their life eternally in hell do realize that God's judgment was fair for their life.

21. Verse 38: Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, "Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you."
- a) There is no pleasing some people.
  - b) This verse in context seems to say, "OK, Jesus we buy your arguments that you can't be casting out demons by demonic power. Tell you what, show us another miracle, and that will be enough."
  - c) I don't know if the guys in Verse 38 are the ones who had already seen Jesus perform other miracles or if they just heard about Jesus second hand.
  - d) It is almost as if they are saying, "OK Jesus, we are right in front of you. We can tell first hand if you are a magician or the real-deal. Come on, show us a miracle."
  - e) If there is one thing I have learned as a Christian, is that God does not show off his power to unbelievers. You cannot put God in a "box" and say, "OK God, if you prove to me right here, right now, that you are real, I'll follow you."
    - i) The problem is God knows people's hearts. He knows those who would really follow through and those who won't. God wants you to come to Him out of your own free will, not because "He owes you".
    - ii) I have seen tremendous miracles performed by those who do turn their lives over to Jesus. In this verse, I'm talking about those who doubt or don't believe Jesus demanding to see a sign. Notice Jesus response in Verse 39:
22. Verse 39: He (Jesus) answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. <sup>40</sup> For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. <sup>41</sup> The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here. <sup>42</sup> The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here.
- a) Jesus is saying, "You want a sign if I'm the Messiah or not, read your Bible! Every page of the Old Testament points to me being the Messiah. Every aspect of my life, my miracles, my teachings, my birth, my death and resurrection, and my second coming are taught somewhere in the Old Testament. If you believe that is the Word of God, use the Bible to judge whether I am the Messiah or not.
    - i) Further Jesus is saying, "Another miracle won't make a difference. If you don't believe what is written in the bible, why would you believe another "sign"?
      - a) Notice what Jesus says on another occasion: "He (Jesus) said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead. (Luke 16:31, NIV)
  - b) Next Jesus uses two examples from the Old Testament as examples as judgment.
  - c) First of all Jesus says that just as Jonah was 3 days/nights in earth, so will the "Son of Man" be three days/nights in the earth.
    - i) Jesus is saying that in the story of Jonah, the fact that Jonah was in the belly of the "great fish" for 3 days/nights is not just a historical fact about Jonah. It was also written as a prediction about Jesus resurrection.
      - a) It is a simple illustration of how one is to read the Old Testament. Not only do the historical stories have direct applications to our lives, but one studies the Old Testament as patterns about the purpose of Jesus.
    - ii) By the way, I could spend a page or two on the implications of this verse.
      - a) Does this mean Jonah was actually "dead" for 3 days and got life again?
      - b) Does this mean Jesus was dead for three "full" days? This leads to the classical Christian debate over how long Jesus was actually dead.
      - c) I'm running long, so I'll save those thoughts for another day! ☺

- d) The next example is, “The Queen of the South” and the Jewish King Solomon.
    - i) This refers to a story in 1<sup>st</sup> Kings 10:1-13.
      - a) When King Solomon was at the height of his power, the Queen of “Sheba” (the Arab peninsula) came to check out Solomon’s wealth and wisdom.
      - b) In summary, she was impressed and took home some parting gifts. ☺
    - ii) Jesus point of both Jonah and The Queen of the South is that in both cases, these two people were changed by the seeing the power of God at work.
    - iii) Jesus condemnation of the local Jews is saying in effect, “Look, these people saw miracles and were impressed enough to change. Here I am, more powerful than Jonah or King Solomon, and you guys are not budging an inch. Since you were exposed to more “truth” than Jonah or the Queen of the South, they will condemn you because you should have known better.”
    - iv) Boy, I’d hate to be at their trial. ☺
23. Verse 43: "When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. <sup>44</sup> Then it says, 'I will return to the house I left.' When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. <sup>45</sup> Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first. That is how it will be with this wicked generation."
- a) These are some of the spookiest verses in the Gospels.
  - b) They are saying that when a demon is cast out of person, if that person does not change, that demon can come back and bring along seven of his buddies.”
    - i) This implies that a person can be possessed by more than one demon.
    - ii) Second, it makes you wonder what it takes for a person to prevent a demon to come back again.
    - iii) Studying the bible, you never read of a believer being demon possessed. I believe that once you are born-again, you are safe from that. Demons can still cause you to sin and tempt you, but that is entirely different form being possessed.
  - c) One of the strangest ideas in Verse 43 is that demons seek rest in “arid” (i.e., dry) places and can’t find it. Does that mean they need “moist” places to live?
    - i) People are mostly water. I’ve always wondered if that is what Jesus meant.
    - ii) “Water” in the Old and New Testament is also associated with the word of God.
      - a) “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, (Ephesians 5:25b, -26, NIV)
      - b) I’m speculating here, but I wonder if Jesus meant that when demons are looking for “dry places” it means people who are “dry-of-God’s word” in their lives. If my theory is true, it is simply further proof that demons can’t possess believers.
  - d) The last sentence of Verse 35 says, “That is how it will be with this wicked generation.”
    - i) For those who reject Jesus, I do believe one’s personal life goes from bad to worse.
    - ii) Spend time with seniors who have rejected God all of their life. In the end, they are bitter, angry and fell that life has short-changed them.
    - iii) Jesus uses the illustration that those who are demon possessed may get 7 more demons eventually. In a broader sense, I believe Jesus is talking about people who reject him. Over the remainder of their lifetime, their actions will grow worse.

24. Verse 46: While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him.<sup>47</sup> Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you."<sup>48</sup> He replied to him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?"<sup>49</sup> Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers.<sup>50</sup> For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."
- a) In the Roman Catholic tradition, one can pray to Mary to intercede on God's behalf.
    - i) Here is Jesus giving his mother and brothers a small rebuke and says, "For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."
    - ii) It is not an anti-Mary or anti-Jesus' brother statement.
    - iii) It is about perspective from God's eye.
    - iv) God wants us to come to Him. We can't get extra points because we happen to know a family member. ☺
    - v) As someone who grew up Catholic, it never dawned on me that I could pray directly to God and didn't need Mary, or anyone else for intercession. It was just something I was taught to do and never thought much about it."
  - b) God wants a direct-family relationship with all of us.
    - i) Jesus says that whoever does the will of God-the-Father is like a brother to me, is like a sister to me and like a mother to me.
    - ii) In heaven, its not what you know, its who you know. It's all about knowing Jesus.
    - iii) At this point in time, Jesus brothers did not believe in Him. Jesus' mother probably did, although she may not have understood the full impact of Jesus first coming. This verse is not an anti-Jesus family "shot", it is about how one approaches Jesus and what one does with that information.
25. Well, I'm running way long, so let's wrap it up of the week.
26. Let's pray: Heavenly Father, for many of us, knowledge of Jesus as Messiah is old news. It is not about knowing this information, it is about doing something about it. Give us the power, the boldness and the grace to be your witnesses to the world and live the life you desire for us. It is with great joy that we are spared from the second judgment and even greater joy that you love us as one loves a direct family member. Help us to reflect that love, as we live for you. For we ask this in Jesus name, Amen.