

Notes for Matthew –Chapter 12 (Page 1 of 6)

Introduction – “The danger of religious tradition”

1. Chapter 12 marks the time period where the Nation of Israel corporately rejects Jesus.
 - a. From Chapter 13 and onward, Jesus speaks publicly in parables.
 - b. We'll learn in Chapter 13 the reason Jesus does this is to hide the truth from unbelievers.
2. The overriding theme of Chapter 12 has to do with the problem of religious traditions.
 - a. This is the danger of Christian church traditions taking place over biblical principles.
 - b. This also includes the danger of emphasizing one aspect of the bible over another.
 - i. For example, this chapter tells the story of some Pharisees emphasizing Sabbath rules on “rest” over the idea of biblical compassion.
 - c. These Pharisees were so obsessed with their interpretation of “resting on the Sabbath”, that the issue became a priority over other biblical based principals.
3. Don't read Chapter 12 and say, “Well, look at those naïve Pharisees. They didn't get it.” Instead, think about our own life, and our own church and ponder, “Is there any aspect of our life or our own church where I am putting religious traditions over what the bible instructs for us?”
 - a. 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.
 - b. We have our own preconceived notions that “Christians should do this and not do that”.
 - i. This is not about violating biblical principals, but accepting other possible views.
 - ii. One has to remember to read bible passages in context, and read passages in light of what the rest of the bible teaches and then attempt to interpret meaning.

Chapter 12 Verses 1-2: 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. ² When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, "Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath."

1. Chapter 12 changes topics from Chapter 11: (In the original text, there are no chapter breaks.)
2. 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.
 - a. Their version of Judaism is the basis of the Orthodox branch of modern Judaism.
3. The Pharisees were condemning Jesus' disciples for not “resting” on the Sabbath.
 - a. The Sabbath is simply the 7th day of the week. The 4th of the 10 commandments is for us to “rest” on the Sabbath (Exodus 20:8-11). This day has become Saturday on our calendar.
4. The roads from town to town often went past grain fields. This was an agricultural society.
 - a. It is not against Jewish law to eat on the Sabbath.
 - b. 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 that wheat. It would be like saying, “No exercise allowed, and peeling a banana is considered exercise”.
 - c. The Pharisee's were straining to find something of which to make an accusation against Jesus. Jesus didn't violate the Sabbath, only their interpretation of the 4th commandment.

Verses 3-7: He (Jesus) answered, "Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? ⁴ 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. ⁵ Or haven't you read in the Law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple desecrate the day and yet are innocent? ⁶ I tell you that one greater than the temple is here. ⁷ If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent.

1. The first thing to notice is how Jesus responded. He used Old Testament Scripture.
 - a. When the religious zealot “enforcers” come to you and say how you are not obeying one of the rules, calmly respond with God's word.

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Verses 3-7 (cont.):

2. Jesus pointed out other passages in the bible where King David “violated” the Sabbath in order to eat the bread designated for the priest. (1st Samuel 21:1-6)
 - a. 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).
3. Jesus sums up this whole section with the phrase, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice”.
 - a. This is a quote of the first half of Hosea 6:6.
 - b. Sacrifice is to give up something for someone else.
 - i. This is the biblical concept behind “love”: to give up one’s desires in order to please someone else’s desires.
 - c. Jesus is speaking of the danger of making sacrifices for God at the expense of not being compassionate to others.
4. 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. At the same time we can’t ignore compassion at the expense of religious “works”.
 - a. Given a choice between doing something compassionate for others versus doing something sacrificial for God, do the compassionate thing first.
 - b. God’s desire is that we be a good witness to others first, and sacrifice to God second.

Verse 8: "For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

1. Jesus created all things (see John 1:2, Colossians, 1:16). That means he made the Sabbath.
2. To be “Lord of the Sabbath” is to say, “I’m, God, I’m in charge of the Sabbath & I make the rules”.
3. “What about Christians and the Sabbath?” How should we obey this commandment?
 - a. Since Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath, we as Christians need to look at what He says for the answer. Further, we can study the Book of Acts and the Epistles and see what they said about the church and the Sabbath.
 - b. Paul said (paraphrasing) “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)
 1. What Paul is saying is there are a number of ways that a Christian can observe “The Sabbath”. Pick a “biblical” way that is right for you, and don’t worry about how other Christians are “keeping the Sabbath”.

Verses 9-13: Going on from that place, he (Jesus) went into their synagogue, ¹⁰ 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?" ¹¹ 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? ¹² How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." ¹³ 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.

1. Here was Jesus walking into a synagogue. Among the audience were a lot of Pharisee’s and a man with a shriveled hand.
2. The Pharisee’s understood that Jesus had the power of a miracle-worker. The Pharisee’s believe that Jesus violated the “no-work-on-the-Sabbath” clause by using his powers to heal.
 - a. 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.
 - b. They were ignoring the concept behind, “I desire mercy and not sacrifice”.

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Verses 9-13 (cont.):

3. 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.
 - a. The Jewish "official" commentary on the Old Testament is a collective works called the Talmud. The Talmud had large sections what is "work" and "rest" on the Sabbath.
 - b. The Talmud had commentary on how/many sheep may be rescued on the Sabbath.
4. Notice in Verse 13, Jesus tells the man with the withered hand to "stretch it out".
 - a. Imagine telling a wheelchair-confined person to stand up or a blind man to "read this"!
 - b. Give the withered-hand-man some credit. He knows that to obey Jesus was a violation of the religious leaders interpretation of the Sabbath.
 - c. 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; Come, follow me!"

Verse 14: But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus.

1. Notice the lack of "Praise-God's" for this miracle by the Pharisee's! ☹
2. 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.

Verses 15-16: Aware of this, Jesus withdrew from that place. Many followed him, and he healed all their sick, ¹⁶ warning them not to tell who he was.

1. When Jesus left the synagogue, many choose to follow Jesus.
2. Don't take that lightly. That meant being ex-communicated by from their synagogue.
3. Notice the positive side of those who left: "and he (Jesus) healed all their sick."
 - a. 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 and above that is a bonus!

Verses 17-21: This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: ¹⁸ "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. ¹⁹ He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets. ²⁰ A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he leads justice to victory. ²¹ In his name the nations will put their hope."

1. Verse 17 says Jesus did "this" to fulfill what was written in Isaiah; Vs. 18-21 quotes Isaiah 42:1-4.
2. Verse 19 says, "He will not quarrel or cry out "; based on this, I don't think Jesus raised his voice.
3. Verse 20 says, "A bruised reed he will not break". It means Jesus was not a man of violence.
4. Matthew, the former tax collector was probably used to being insulted. I suspect he was impressed with Jesus' ability to stay calm when others were insulting him.

Verses 22-23: 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. ²³ All the people were astonished and said, "Could this be the Son of David?"

1. Jewish exorcism required the demon-possessed man to utter the demon's name. Since this man was mute, the exorcism by Jesus was all that more impressive.
2. The crowd who is now following Jesus saw even greater miracles than the "withered hand" cure.
 - a. 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)
 - b. As we grow in our faith, we will continue to see greater things by Jesus!

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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."

1. Beelzebub in this context, is a reference to Satan himself. It means "chief of demons".
2. The Pharisees are accusing Jesus of using demonic power to cast out demons.

Verses 25-26: 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. ²⁶ If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand?"

1. 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?"

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."

1. "Well, if you accuse me of driving out demons by Satanic power, what power do you Jews use?"
2. There is another explanation of this verse based on an alternative English translation:
 - a. And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out?" (NKJV)
 - b. Verse 27 then says, "So then, they will be your judges."
 - c. Using this alternative translation, Jesus may be pointing to his disciples judging them.
 - d. When Jesus says, "your sons" cast them out, Jesus may be referring to Christians giving the power to exorcise demons.
3. With the alternative translation, this verse implies that the disciples will judge nonbelieving Jews.
 - a. Jesus said to them (his disciples), "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)

Verse 28: "But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you."

1. 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".

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."

1. Let me paraphrase "If I wanted to rob a house, and there was a guard, how can I "rob" unless I tie the guard up first? For me to steal I have to be more powerful than the guard, or I couldn't rob the place. Therefore, how can I cast out demons unless I was more powerful than demons?"

Verse 30: "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters."

1. Either you are working for Jesus or you are against him. There is no neutral ground.

Verses 31-32: And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. ³² 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.

1. These two verses are known as the "Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit"
 - a. This is considered the only unforgivable sin in the bible.
 - b. 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.
 - c. 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.
 - d. If you are unwilling to accept the Jesus' sacrifice for sins, how can God forgive you?

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Verses 31-32: (cont.)

2. 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"
 - a. To claim "Jesus is of the devil" is blasphemy of the Holy Spirit.
 - b. In a broad sense, all people condemned to hell who are aware of Jesus have committed blasphemy of the Holy Spirit.
 - c. 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.
 - d. Is there a point of "going too far?" There probably is, but we don't know that point".
 - e. This is the danger of getting set in your ways.
 - f. Only God the Father can ever know if someone has committed this unforgivable sin..

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.

1. How does one know if someone is a follower of Jesus? Look at their "fruit"
2. We are to be "fruit inspectors" of others.
 - a. We are to watch the behavior of other people. Are they "proclaiming" Jesus and doing the things He commands us to do in the Bible or are they denying Jesus as God?
3. Being a "fruit inspector" has to be kept in balance with compassion and mercy for others.

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.

1. John the Baptist used the same insult when the Pharisee's visited him (Matthew 3:7)
2. To call someone "brood of vipers" is to call them a "group of snakes".
3. It is an insult and comparing their remarks as being demonic (Satan became snake-like in Eden).

Verses 35-36: 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. ³⁶ But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. ³⁷ For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned."

1. In order to understand these verses, first, we need to talk about eternal judgment.
2. 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. (See (Revelation 20: 4-6, NIV)
3. 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. Jesus said in Vs. 36, "that men will give an account...for every careless word...spoken".
 - c. We as Christians are not part of that judgment as Jesus forgave all of our sins.

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."

1. To paraphrase, "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."
 - a. 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."
 - b. God wants you to come to Him out of your own free will, not because "He owes you".

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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. ⁴⁰ 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. ⁴¹ 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. ⁴² 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.

1. Jesus is saying, "You want a sign if I'm the Messiah or not, read your Bible!"
 - a. To paraphrase, "Another miracle won't make a difference. If you don't believe what is written in the bible, why would you believe another "sign"?"
2. Jesus says that just as Jonah was 3 days and nights in earth, so will the "Son of Man" will be three days and nights in the earth.
 - a. Jesus is stating that Jonah was in the belly of the "great fish" for three days & nights is not just a historical fact about Jonah. It is as a prediction of Jesus' resurrection.
 - b. Jonah was a witness to the foreign city of Nineveh. They repented at Jonah's preaching.
3. The next example is, "The Queen of the South" and the Jewish King Solomon (1st 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. To summarize 1st Kings Chapter 10, she was impressed, she worshipped the God of Israel and left with some nice parting gifts. ☺
4. To paraphrase, "Look, Nineveh and the Queen of South were convicted and repented. Here I am, the Messiah himself, and you guys are not budging an inch. They will condemn you because you should have known better". (Notice Jesus picks non-Jews who repented!)

Verses 43-45: "When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. ⁴⁴ 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. ⁴⁵ 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."

1. Jesus is saying that when a demon leaves a person, if that person does not change, that demon can come back and bring along seven of his buddies.
2. Studying the bible, you never read of a believer being demon possessed.
3. Verse 43 is that demons seek rest in "arid" (dry) places and can't find it. Does that mean demons need "moist" places to live?
 - a. I'm speculating but I wonder if Jesus meant that when demons are looking for "dry places" it means people who are "dry-of-God's word"?
 - b. Water is a word-picture of the Word of God because it "spiritually refreshes & cleanses".
 1. "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)

Verses 46-50: While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. ⁴⁷ Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you." ⁴⁸ He replied to him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" ⁴⁹ Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. ⁵⁰ For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

1. God wants us to come to Him. We can't get extra points because we know a family member. ☺
2. Jesus says that whoever does the will of God-the-Father is like a brother/sister/mother to me.
3. In heaven, its not what you know, its who you know. It's all about knowing Jesus.