

Ministry of Grace

Matthew 12

Preface:

In the previous chapter of Matthew's gospel, he talked about how the religious leaders were ignoring the indications from God that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand. Both John the Baptist and Jesus implored the people to repent because the kingdom was near. Jesus even went so far as to compare them to children sitting in the marketplace ignoring their friends' attempt to get them to play. Jesus went on to condemn the cities where He had performed many miracles because, like the religious leaders, they ignored the obvious indications of the presence of their Messiah.

The religious leaders, apparently reacting to Jesus' accusations against them, now began to pursue and persecute Jesus and His followers. They listened to His message, not because they wanted to learn anything from Him, but because they wanted to find things about which they could accuse Him in order to have Him condemned by the common people as well as the religious leaders.

The Disciples Eat Grain on the Sabbath

Matthew 12:1-8

¹At that time Jesus went through the grain fields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. ²But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, "Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath." ³He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, and those who were with him: ⁴how he entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him to eat nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? ⁵Or have you not read in the Law how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless? ⁶I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. ⁷And if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. ⁸For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath."

Mark 2:23-28 – ²³One Sabbath he was going through the grain fields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. ²⁴And the Pharisees were saying to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" ²⁵And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: ²⁶how he entered the house of God, in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?" ²⁷And he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. ²⁸So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath."

Luke 6:1-5 –¹On a Sabbath, while he was going through the grain fields, his disciples plucked and ate some heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands. ²But some of the Pharisees said, "Why are you doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath?" ³And Jesus answered them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: ⁴how he entered the house of God and took and ate the bread of the Presence, which is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those with him?" ⁵And he said to them, "The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath."

Notes:

The first accusation against Jesus and His disciples was what they perceived as them breaking the Law which forbids any work to be done on the Sabbath. We tend to think of "The Law" as containing the Ten Commandments. In actuality, the Law contained more than 600 commandments. In addition to these, the traditions handed down by the elders included many more requirements that were not actually part of the Law.

For instance, the fourth commandment says:

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. (Exodus 20:8-11)

The purpose of this commandment was to persuade the people not to overwork themselves, their families, their servants, or their animals. Therefore, they were to take a day off one day a week. The justification given was that even God rested on the seventh day after creating the heavens and the earth. And, lest the men rested and required the women to work by making their meals on the Sabbath, God even forbid the preparation of food on the Sabbath. We see this in **Exodus 16:23**, where God forbid the Israelites to either gather or cook manna on the Sabbath.

It was perfectly legal for an Israelite to walk through their neighbor's field to pluck and eat the grain in order to satisfy their hunger. What the Pharisees objected to was the fact that the disciples were doing it on the Sabbath. You see, the Pharisees were so focused on the letter of the law that they completely missed the intent of the law. In response to the objection by the Pharisees, Jesus gave them a couple of examples where the law was violated without ramifications: David and his people eating the sacrificial showbread and the priests performing their duties on the Sabbath.

The Pharisees considered it a sacrifice on their part to strictly adhere to every part of the law especially if it caused them hardship or pain. Thus, the Pharisees would have considered not plucking and eating when they were hungry as a sacrifice. They believed that this was pleasing to God. That's why Jesus quoted **Hosea 6:6**, which says, "For I delight in mercy rather than sacrifice, and in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings."

Jesus Heals a Withered Hand in the Synagogue

Matthew 12:9-14

⁹He went on from there and entered their synagogue. ¹⁰And a man was there with a withered hand. And they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"--so that they might accuse him. ¹¹He said to them, "Which one of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out? ¹²Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." ¹³Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And the man stretched it out, and it was restored, healthy like the other. ¹⁴But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him.

Mark 3:1-6 – ¹Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there with a withered hand. ²And they watched Jesus, to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. ³And he said to the man with the withered hand, "Come here." ⁴And he said to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent. ⁵And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. ⁶The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

Luke 6:6-11 – ⁶On another Sabbath, he entered the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was withered. ⁷And the scribes and the Pharisees watched him, to see whether he would heal on the Sabbath, so that they might find a reason to accuse him. ⁸But he knew their thoughts, and he said to the man with the withered hand, "Come and stand here." And he rose and stood there. ⁹And Jesus said to them, "I ask you, is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to destroy it?" ¹⁰And after looking around at them all he said to him, "Stretch out your hand." And he did so, and his hand was restored. ¹¹But they were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus.

Notes:

Jesus then entered into the synagogue of those same Pharisees who had just accused His disciples of breaking the Law. There He encountered a man with a withered hand. The Greek word translated “withered” is *xeros*, which means “dried up” or “withered.” By reading all three accounts of this event, we see that the Pharisees taunted him by asking “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” Then, Jesus turned this question around and asked them, “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?” The difference in these two questions is subtle but significant. The focus of the Pharisees was the letter of the Law. Jesus’ focus was on whether doing a good work should be limited by what day of the week it is.

He then asked them if they would rescue one of their sheep if it fell into a pit on the Sabbath. A literal translation of this verse says, “What man of you who shall have **one** sheep, and it fall into a pit ...” In Luke’s gospel account he says, “Which of you having a son or an ox fall into a pit on the Sabbath ...” Whether it is an only sheep, a son, or an ox, the Pharisees would recognize that their concern for their animal or son would force them to rescue the one in trouble. In fact, the “traditions” of the elders had long since made it lawful to rescue an animal on the Sabbath.

Why did the Pharisees make it lawful to rescue one of their own animals (or children) on the Sabbath, but not lawful to heal someone else? The answer lies in the focus. Rescuing something

of their own represents an inward, or self-ward, focus, whereas helping someone else represents an outward, unselfish focus.

Notice also that the Pharisees' penchant for keeping the Law was itself based on an inward focus. They were motivated by a desire to have God (and others) see them as righteous (selfish focus), rather than a desire to please God by doing what is right. Again, the distinction is subtle, but significant. It is the difference between doing what I want verses doing what God wants me to do.

When Jesus healed the man with the withered hand, the Pharisees should have seen this miracle as a good work. But, because they were so enslaved to their legalism, they could not see the miracle (or the Messiah who had just performed the miracle) and they conspired together how they could destroy Him.

Notice: this is one of the times where Jesus became angry with their selfish motives,

And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man ... (Mark 3:5)

God's Chosen Servant

Matthew 12:15-21

¹⁵Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from there. And many followed him, and he healed them all ¹⁶and ordered them not to make him known. ¹⁷This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: ¹⁸"Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. ¹⁹He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets; ²⁰a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory; ²¹and in his name the Gentiles will hope."

Mark 3:7-12 – ⁷Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the sea, and a great crowd followed, from Galilee and Judea ⁸and Jerusalem and Idumea and from beyond the Jordan and from around Tyre and Sidon. When the great crowd heard all that he was doing, they came to him. ⁹And he told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, lest they crush him, ¹⁰for he had healed many, so that all who had diseases pressed around him to touch him. ¹¹And whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, "You are the Son of God." ¹²And he strictly ordered them not to make him known.

Notes:

Knowing the intentions of the Pharisees and the Herodians, Jesus retreated. This, in itself, was contrary to what the Pharisees believed about the coming Messiah. They thought he would be a conquering king who was to rule with a rod of iron. Indeed, He will rule with a rod of iron during the Millennial reign. The religious leaders, however, did not recognize the prophecies about the first coming of their Messiah that portrayed Him as one who would not quarrel or cry aloud (a battle cry). It is fitting, therefore, that Matthew would quote **Isaiah 42:1-4**. The quote given by Matthew was the Septuagint version of the Old Testament.

This quote includes, “and he will proclaim justice to the **Gentiles** ...and in his name the **Gentiles** will hope.” It is interesting that Mark makes note of the fact that many Gentiles had followed Him.

Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the sea, and a great crowd followed, from Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem and Idumea and from beyond the Jordan and from around Tyre and Sidon. When the great crowd heard all that he was doing, they came to him.

(Mark 3:7,8)

Jesus is accused of Casting out Demons by Beelzbul

Matthew 12:22-32

²²Then a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute was brought to him, and he healed him, so that the man spoke and saw. ²³And all the people were amazed, and said, "Can this be the Son of David?" ²⁴But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons." ²⁵Knowing their thoughts, he said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. ²⁶And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? ²⁷And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. ²⁸But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. ²⁹Or how can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house. ³⁰Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. ³¹Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. ³²And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

Mark 3:22-30 – ²²And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "by the prince of demons he casts out the demons." ²³And he called them to him and said to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? ²⁴If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. ²⁶And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end. ²⁷But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house. ²⁸Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, ²⁹but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin"-- ³⁰for they were saying, "He has an unclean spirit."

Luke 11:14-23 – ¹⁴Now he was casting out a demon that was mute. When the demon had gone out, the mute man spoke, and the people marveled. ¹⁵But some of them said, "He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons," ¹⁶while others, to test him, kept seeking from him a sign from heaven. ¹⁷But he, knowing their thoughts, said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls. ¹⁸And if Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? For you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebul. ¹⁹And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your

judges. ²⁰But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. ²¹When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are safe; ²²but when one stronger than he attacks him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his spoil. ²³Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.

Notes:

The demon possessed man was brought to Jesus. We are not told who brought him, but the fact that Jesus originally left the synagogue that the Pharisees were in and separated himself to continue his healing ministry, seems to indicate that the Pharisees brought the man because they were present when this miracle was performed. The people said, “[Can this be the Son of David?](#)” The grammatical form of this question indicates that a negative answer is expected. This is another indication that the Pharisees were now present and the people did not want to offend them.

The Pharisees could no longer deny that Jesus was performing miracles and casting out demons. So, their response was that Jesus must be casting out demons using the power and authority of the prince of demons, Beelzebul. Back in [Matthew 9:34](#), Jesus had cast out a demon from a mute man and was there also accused of casting out demons by the prince of demons. Beelzebul is a transliteration of the Hebrew Ba'al Zebub means “Fly God” or “Lord of the Flies.” In the first century, this was a common title used for Satan as the prince of the demons.

Jesus now attempts to reason logically with the Pharisees. First, He proposes that any collective force divided against itself cannot be successful. Then, He points out that if He was casting out demons by Satan’s power, Satan would be working against himself. It would therefore logically follow that He couldn’t be casting out demons by Satan’s power. However, knowing that they would not accept that logical proof, he gave them another logical argument, if their own exorcists cast out demons by the power of God, how is this any different than what He did? Finally, Jesus lowers the hammer on them. Since their own highly educated rabbis must be using the power of God to cast out demons, then Jesus is also using the power of God to cast them out. And if this is true, then the Kingdom of God has come to them, just as Jesus and John the Baptist have been proclaiming all along.

Knowing that the Pharisees wouldn’t accept a logical argument, Jesus switches to using a parable about a strong man protecting his own house. As we will see below in verses 43 through 45, the house is a reference to the human body. Here, Jesus’ reference to a strong man is Satan himself. If Satan is in control of a person through a demon possession, then only a stronger force (God) can bind the demon and take over. Jesus is clearly declaring to the Pharisees that He is using the power of God to cast out demons. And, He says, in effect, that anyone not accepting this reasoning is acting against the Kingdom of God and His power.

He next declares to the religious leaders that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is the unforgivable sin. That is, denying that something the Holy Spirit did was not done by him. There are two primary interpretations of this. The first is that the unforgivable sin is attributing the works (miracles) of Jesus to the devil. Therefore, the unforgivable sin can’t be committed today because Jesus is not performing physical miracles today.

While this may seem reasonable given the discussion that Jesus just had with the Pharisees, there is a problem with this interpretation. It is the fact that Jesus said,

And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.
(Matthew 12:32)

Jesus made it very clear that the unforgivable sin could be committed in “this age or in the age to come.” Therefore, there must be another meaning to the unforgivable sin.

It took me years to understand this, so let me explain. Jesus’ death on the cross paid for all sins, didn’t it? Not just the sins we’ve already committed, but even all the sins we are going to commit in the remainder of our life. So, how is any sin unforgivable? It’s easier to understand from this side of the cross, which is part of the reason why the Pharisees didn’t understand. We know that forgiveness of sin is the result of faith, that is, belief in certain facts. Those facts include:

- Everyone descended from Adam is a sinner
As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; (Romans 3:10)
for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, (Romans 3:23)
therefore, you and I are all unrighteous sinners. The Pharisees didn’t believe this.
- The penalty for sin is death
For the wages of sin is death ... (Romans 6:23a)
therefore, you and I deserve death. The Pharisees would have known this if they studied what happened to Adam and Eve when they ate the forbidden fruit.
- But God offers us salvation (eternal life)
but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23b)
The Pharisees would not have known this unless they listened to what Jesus taught Nicodemus, i.e. John 3:16
- This salvation comes as a result of God’s love
but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
(Romans 5:8)
- Salvation is acquired by belief and confession
because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.
(Romans 10:9-10)
without belief and confession, we are not saved. The Pharisees denied that Jesus is Lord and that His works were done through the power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore they were not saved and their sins were not forgiven.
- This salvation is the work of the Holy Spirit

In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

(Ephesians 1:13-14)

- No one can declare Jesus as Lord unless He has the enlightening of the Holy Spirit
Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus is accursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit.
(1 Corinthians 12:3)

Now, here is the crux of the unforgivable sin. If you deny the power and work of the Holy Spirit, you are not, and cannot be saved. Denying the power and work of the Holy Spirit is the unforgivable sin, since it is one and the same with not believing and confessing that Jesus is Lord. Anyone who does not confess Jesus as Lord does not have his or her sins forgiven. That is the unforgivable sin.

A Tree is Known by its Fruit

Matthew 12:33-37

³³Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. ³⁴You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. ³⁵The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. ³⁶I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, ³⁷for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

Luke 6:43-45 – ⁴³For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, ⁴⁴for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. ⁴⁵The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

Notes:

Have you ever known someone who claims to be a Christian yet shows no evidence of it in his or her life? It's pretty safe to assume that this person is not really saved. This is not to say that when a person gets saved he or she no longer sins. We all know that's not true. We all have a sin nature which causes us to sin daily. Jesus tells us here that we know what's inside a person by the way he or she behaves. Also notice that **we are supposed to judge people** by their actions.

Earlier, in the 7th chapter of Matthew's gospel he said, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits." (Matthew 7:15-16a)

We must all be ever vigilant about this. I don't mean that we should be constantly condemning a person by their behavior. I mean that we should all be more aware of our own behavior. Do my words and actions demonstrate that I am born again? We must all ask ourselves, "If I were arrested today for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict me?"

Jesus says, “for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.” Do your vocabulary and your manner of conversation declare you to be a child of God?

The Sign of Jonah

Matthew 12:38-42

³⁸Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you." ³⁹But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. ⁴⁰For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. ⁴¹The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. ⁴²The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.

Luke 11:29-32 – ²⁹When the crowds were increasing, he began to say, "This generation is an evil generation. It seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah. ³⁰For as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so will the Son of Man be to this generation. ³¹The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with the men of this generation and condemn them, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here. ³²The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.

Notes:

No one can be neutral when it comes to the person and work of Jesus. You either believe or you don't. And, it seems that those who don't are always trying to prove that we believers are wrong. In Jesus day, the Pharisees didn't believe that he was the Messiah and they continually demonstrated it by questioning and challenging Him. Verse 38 is a perfect example of that. Even though the Pharisees were aware of the many miracles that Jesus had performed and had even witnessed Him healing and casting out demons, they still demanded a sign from Him.

Instead of arguing with the Pharisees, and instead of responding harshly with, “Haven't you seen me do miracle after miracle already?” he simply told them of the ultimate sign of His divinity. He said that He would rise from the dead. But Jesus didn't say it so bluntly. He said, “Jonah the prophet was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish. I will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”

And, lest we think that this was overly cryptic and that the Pharisees didn't understand what He was saying, consider what the chief priests and Pharisees said to Pilate after Jesus was placed in the tomb.

... "Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise.' Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last fraud will be worse than the first." (Matthew 27:63-64)

Also, notice the subtlety of his accusation regarding their lack of faith. Jonah was the only one of the Jewish prophets who was sent to the Gentiles, and the Gentiles believed Jonah. The Queen of Sheba was a Gentile and she came to see the splendor of King Solomon. These Gentiles became believers based on very little evidence. The Pharisees would not believe even with their Messiah standing in their midst performing Messianic miracles. In fact, in the Matthew 27 quote above, they accused Jesus of being a fraud.

Return of the Unclean Spirit

Matthew 12:43-45

⁴³When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, but finds none. ⁴⁴Then it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when it comes, it finds the house empty, swept, and put in order. ⁴⁵Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there, and the last state of that person is worse than the first. So also will it be with this evil generation."

Luke 11:24-26 – ²⁴When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and finding none it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' ²⁵And when it comes, it finds the house swept and put in order. ²⁶Then it goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there. And the last state of that person is worse than the first."

Notes:

We can learn a couple of things about demons from this passage. The first is that they don't want to be disembodied spirits. Outside a body they are uncomfortable and seek rest and refreshment. The second thing we learn about them is that if there is no resistance to them re-entering the body they were cast out of, they may enter in again. The only protection against that was hinted at in Jesus' earlier message in [Matthew 12:29](#),

Or how can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house.

Christians have the Holy Spirit of God living within us. God is stronger than any demon. Therefore, a Christian cannot be demon possessed.

Jesus' Mother and Brothers

Matthew 12:46-50

⁴⁶While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him. ⁴⁷[Someone told him, "Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, asking to speak to you."] ⁴⁸But he replied to the man who told him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" ⁴⁹And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! ⁵⁰For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

Mark 3:31-35 – ³¹And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. ³²And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you." ³³And he answered them, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" ³⁴And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers!" ³⁵For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother."

Luke 8:19-21 – ¹⁹Then his mother and his brothers came to him, but they could not reach him because of the crowd. ²⁰And he was told, "Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, desiring to see you." ²¹But he answered them, "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it."

Notes:

First of all, the best manuscripts do not include verse 47. It apparently was copied from Mark or Luke. In spite of that, this overall passage contains a critical message to all who would follow Christ. While he was teaching, Jesus' mother and half-brothers came and wanted to speak to him. We are not told what they wanted to talk about, but that's not the important thing to see here. Although they were his physical family, there is a family that is more important to Jesus, His spiritual family. So, who are Jesus' spiritual family? The obvious answer is, "believers!" According to the Apostle John, in **1 John 3:1** we are told:

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.

Today, this family is not defined by those who profess Christianity, but by those who live Christianity. Later in the same letter John said:

No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother. (**1 John 3:9-10**)

And, here in Matthew's gospel account, Jesus tells everyone who His real family is.

And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." (**Matthew 12:49-50**)

So What?

We've learned a number of things from this 12th chapter of Matthew's gospel account. We've seen that the religious leaders of Jesus' day were so blinded by their hatred for Jesus that they couldn't see that He was their promised Messiah. They missed all the signs and every attempt He made to reveal Himself to them.

He healed a man's withered hand, but because their idea of religion included not doing anything on the Sabbath, they missed the miracle. He cast a demon out of a man who was mute and blind. But they missed the Messianic miracle even though it was part of what the prophets had said regarding their Messiah:

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. (Isaiah 35:5-6a)

They even accused Jesus of using the power of the Devil to cast out demons. As a result, Jesus warned them that they would be judged by the things they said.

And, not only had they missed all the miraculous signs which indicated that Jesus was their Messiah, they went so far as to demand another sign from Him. That's like a child who refuses to eat the healthy food his or her parents put on their plate and then later complains about being hungry. Jesus' response to their demand for a sign was to proclaim that he would rise from the dead.

Finally, Jesus revealed to His followers, that He was more interested in those who were part of his spiritual family than those who were his physical family. This is very likely the most important teaching in this entire chapter. And yet – it is missed by many who read through this passage.

What do we have to do to be part of Jesus' family? Get saved and be born again? Not according to Jesus! Here's what He said:

For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.
(Matthew 12:49-50)

Yes, in order to be part of Jesus' family we have to be born again. But, the real key to being part of Jesus' spiritual family is doing God's will. But, what does that mean? There are two aspects of God's will. Theologians refer to them as God's revealed will and God's mysterious will. God's *revealed will* includes things that we are specifically told to do or not to do. God's *mysterious will* involves what He wants us to do in situations that are not definitively described in the Bible.

Let's start with His revealed will. There are several verses in the New Testament that specifically state what we should do or not do because it is God's will. For instance,

- Do good deeds (1 Peter 2:15)
- Give thanks in all circumstances (1 Thessalonians 5:18)
- Abstain from sexual immorality (1 Thessalonians 4:3)

There are other verses that tell us what we should do because in so doing God will bless us,

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing. (James 1:22-25)

OK, but what about God's mysterious will? How do we know what God wants us to do when it's something that's not specifically spelled out in the Bible? How do we know if God wants us to sell our house and move to another? How do we know if God wants us to accept or reject a job offer? These things require us to discern God's mysterious will.

I remember when I was in Bible College there were a number of students who did not get involved in a local church because they were "waiting to discover God's will" before making a commitment. They didn't want to go the wrong direction and miss out on God's blessing. The

problem with this is that they were like a ship sitting stationary in the water. You can't steer a ship that is not moving. If we wait until God gives us a miraculous sign, we may miss it just like the Pharisees missed so many of the Messianic signs that Jesus performed. We need to pray, asking God for direction and then listen with our spiritual ears and our heart to what He tells us.

But, what if you never hear God's answer? Do you ever feel like God is ignoring your prayers? According to John's gospel account, that may be because you are currently living outside His will.

We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. (John 9:31)

Is there any other way to know if we are living within God's desirous will? Here's what Paul said about it in his letter to the Romans:

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:2)

But what does that mean, really? What does he mean by being transformed by the renewal of your mind? The word translated "renewal" is *anakainōsis*, which means "to make like new again." It means to get rid of the old and bring in the new. It means "to renovate." But how do we renovate our minds. The only spiritual way to do that is to read and study the Bible and to pray; not just now and then, but consistently. We need to have regular conversations with God making a concerted effort to listen to and hear Him. According to John, if we are not doing this, then we should not expect God to listen to our prayers. If we are not continually in His Word than we won't be able to discern His will for our lives. Only then, as we are being transformed by letting the Spirit of God change our attitudes and actions, can we discern what God's will for our life is. God speaks to us through His Word. If we aren't regularly reading His Word, how will we ever hear Him?

You may be asking, "Why do I keep harping on the subject of being in the Word and seeking God's will?" Here's why. I have known Catholics, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Methodists, Pentecostals, Baptists, and Presbyterians who claim to be Christians but aren't. They believe their church doctrine and partake of all the sacraments. They attend church regularly, tithe faithfully, and volunteer their time. But – they have never submitted to Jesus Christ as LORD. Remember what it says in Romans 10:9?

if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Most people read this as "if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Savior ..." So what's the big deal? We often ask people if they are "saved" but we seldom ask them if they are "submitted." Unless He is our Lord, He **is not** our Savior. Confessing Jesus as Lord means that we have forever submitted control of our life to Him! We have committed to obeying Him and submitting to His will, not our own. Why is this so important? Because of what it says in Matthew 7:21-23:

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, **but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.** On that day many will say to me,

'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.' (Matthew 7:21-23)

That is the most tragic thing in the world! It is even worse than a person who denies the existence of God finding out at the Great White Throne Judgment that they were wrong and are going to spend eternity in the Lake of Fire. What could possibly be worse than that? Thinking you're saved and going to heaven only to find out that you aren't saved after all.

I have gotten to know most of you pretty well and I am convinced that most of you are genuinely saved and submitted to God's will. But there are some of you that I wonder about and I don't want any one of you to face the prospect of the Lake of Fire.

So, I have to ask each of you, "Is Jesus your Lord, your Owner, your Master? And are you seeking His will, or are you seeking your own will and asking God to help you do it?" Which of these do you think puts a smile on His face? Only one of these will get you into Heaven!

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