

Lesson 17: Review of Matthew 12:1-21: "When Truth Interrupts Tradition"

Two portraits emerge in our passage this week. The first is of the Pharisees. Their souls seem to constrict and shrink the more they see and hear of Jesus. The second portrait is of the Lord Jesus Christ whose wisdom and power and grace and beauty shines despite the rugged hardness and unbelief of the religiously serious. What made the Pharisees so hard against Jesus? Was it simple jealousy? Or, did it more reveal the depravity of their darkened and sinful hearts? Gaining some understanding of what causes people to spiritually contract and shrink when faced with an encounter with Jesus may help us understand why people to this day react negatively when the person of Jesus the subject of discussion.

To gain insight into what made the Pharisees react so violently to Jesus we of course need to know what the Bible says about humanity in general. The Bible tells us—both Old and New Testaments—that the human heart is full of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity resulting from Adam's rebellion in the Garden (Genesis 3; Romans 5:12). Adam's sin was imputed to all his offspring. Since the fall of the human race into sin and depravity humanity has continued to remain in darkness by willfully rejecting the light of truth. It is exactly as Jesus said in John 3:19, "men loved (motivating love) darkness instead of light."

This brings us to the heart of the matter, and the matter is serious: humanity was created for worship but men/people have believed "the lie" instead of the truth. Romans 1:25 states plainly, "...they exchanged the truth of God for a/the lie and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator, who is forever praised." So, for the Pharisees it is no small issue of the heart that begins to erupt as they protest Jesus' simple act of eating on the Sabbath. This being true for us, we must watch our hearts and guard against the "little Pharisee" that resides in each of us or we, too, will resist the Lord! Let's look at 12:1-14.

Matthew 12:1-14: "Men with Contracting and Shrinking Souls": These men were so steeped in rigid performance and duty that they missed the love and grace of God as *He* stood in front of them in the person of Jesus Christ. These men were protectors of Israel but because their own hearts were sinful they refused to believe the Scripture and they failed to consider the plain Truth of God revealed in the person of Jesus Christ (see Jn. 5:39,40). They were so busy fault finding that they missed the Faultless One!

At issue was their rigid interpretation of Sabbath regulations. Mind you, these regulations found their source not in the Scriptures but from extra-biblical traditions. The Bible teaches that God made the Sabbath for man, for our good (Mark 2:27). This special day was a day for rest and to enjoy time reflecting on God and His goodness. In our passage Jesus obeys the spirit of the Sabbath as He ate and by healing. Eating and healing are beautiful things which benefit human beings! But, as you can perceive from the passage in Matthew 12, the Pharisees were guilty of regulating the Sabbath *to death*.

Not only were they guilty of stealing the spirit of the Sabbath from the people of God, they were also guilty of pride and of hypocrisy. Jesus draws their attention to David in 1 Samuel 21. Were they more righteous than David who, in the spirit of the Sabbath ate the sacred bread when hungry? Or imagine the hypocrisy of the Pharisees as they cared for, protected and preserved their own livestock on the Sabbath (12:11-12) but would forsake the needs of people. So, Jesus makes it plain: It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath! O, how dangerous it is for us to miss the spirit of the law of love and substitute a rigid, inflexible law of do's and don'ts. When we do the souls of people shrink under such heavy oppression!

Matthew 12:14-16: "Men with Shrinking Souls, pt.2" The Pharisees sensing that they were being opposed by Jesus plotted to kill Jesus. What they refused to do was first submit themselves to the revealed written word of God; and second, they refused to submit themselves to the Living Word of God in Christ! When they rejected Jesus, Jesus left them. How sad to see the Glory of God withdraw from them at this time (12:15; cf. Ez.10). These religious leaders proved that they were ungodly because they refused to obey the Truth. We learn the answer to the "why" question above as we compare their words and actions with what we read in Romans 8:6-8: in summary, their minds were dead to God, they were controlled by the sinful nature, they were at enmity against God and they could not in anyway please God. The same is true of any and all people who do not have the Spirit of Christ living in them (Rm.8:9). Do you have the Spirit of Christ in you? If you are not sure, would you right now cry out asking the Spirit to testify with your spirit that you are one of God's children through faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:15-17).

Finally, **Matthew 12:15-21** reveals a measure of "The Beauty and Glory of Christ the Servant King". This section of Matthew is a direct quote from Isaiah 42:1-4. Matthew appropriately quotes this so that we can see that His glory was hidden from some (The Pharisees; see also Matthew 11:25), but revealed to others (the disciples in 12:1-8 and the man Jesus healed on the Sabbath in the synagogue in 12:9-13). We see Matthew 11:26 applied as Jesus hid Himself from some but revealed Himself to others!

One other point to notice in the Matthew's Isaiah quote. In it Jesus is shown to be both humble and gentle (12:19-20), and also great and majestic (12:18,20b-21)! Jesus, our Savior King is glorious and beautiful!

Questions for Matthew 12:22-37: “A Cause For Despair, or A Cause For Hope”

1. From the notes on page 1, **A)** what impressed and/or helped you? **B)** Explain “A”.

Introduction to Matthew 12:22-37: “A Cause For Despair Or, A Cause For Hope” In Scripture we often find God afflicting the comfortable and comforting the afflicted. In our Matthew study this week I believe this is exactly what we see. We find Jesus once again doing good (Acts 10:38) by healing a demon possessed man. And again we see the Pharisees scoffing and showing their disdain for Christ by accusing Him of being the devil. As a result Jesus schools all who will hear Him. To the Pharisees He gives them warning (12:25-37) that their words are revealing their wicked hearts. At the same time He brings the light of the gospel to those who will accept the evidence that in Him the Kingdom of God has come (12:28-35)!

2. Read Matthew 12:22-24. “Jesus Is Accused of Being A Devil”. **A)** Notice the reaction of the witnesses to the miracle. Who did they “hope” He was? **B)** From the following verses list the people and the circumstances of those people who called Jesus “Son of David”—Matthew 9:27; 15:22; 20:30,31; 21:9, 15; Mark 10:47. **C)** What do you think they were hoping about Jesus when they called Him “Son of David”? (see Matt.1:1; Luke 2:11) **D)** What do the words of the Pharisees in 12:24 reveal about their hearts? **E)** What do your “words” reveal about your own heart? (see also Matt. 12:34b and James 3:3-10) **F)** What have you confessed to the Lord regarding your own heart? Be specific. Be sure to thank Him for forgiving!

3. Read Matthew 12:25-37: “The Answer to the Accusation”. **A)** How could you apply 12:25 to yourself? Read Hebrews 4:12 to help with your answer. **B)** Read 12:26-28. Notice the “If clause” in each verse. Write down the “If clause” and the subsequent logical conclusion in each of the three verses. **C)** Read 12:29. If the devil is the “strong man” then what is Jesus saying His miracles demonstrate about His own power and work? (see also 1 John 3:8) How does this encourage you in your life? **D)** Is the person described in 12:30 necessarily hostile to Jesus Christ? If not, then how would you describe this person? **E)** In contrast to the person in v.30, Jesus, in vv.31-32 is purposefully “blaspheming”. What are the two kinds of blasphemy listed in these verses? Which is forgivable and which is not? (**v.32 will be discussed in the notes!**) **F)** Which is more dangerous and why: The neutrality described in v.30 or the blasphemy described in vv.31-32?

4. Read Matthew 12:28-35: “Jesus Provides “Good News” To Those Who Will Hear”. **A)** Write down the good news revealed in 12:28. **B)** What good news is inferred in 12:29? How does Colossians 2:15 add to your understanding of 12:29? **C)** Jesus gives good news that sins will be forgiven. What do you learn about God’s forgiveness from the follow verses: Ps. 65:3; Ps. 86:5; Ps. 103:11-13; Ps. 130:3-4; Is.1:18; Micah 7:18d-19; 1 Jn. 1:7,9. **D)** 12:33,35. Jesus speaks of good tree, bad tree; good heart, evil heart. Read Ezekiel 36:26-27. What does this verse teach about “good” hearts? **E)** Who is responsible for making a heart good? (see also John 3:3-8) **F)** Why is this good news?