

Lesson 18: Review of Matthew 12:22-37: “A Cause For Despair, or A Cause For Hope”

If you remember our last lesson we saw Jesus withdraw from a situation where He knew that He was in danger of being killed. Apparently, in Matthew 12:22-37 Jesus is resuming His ministry of doing good in the area in or around Capernaum. As he continues healing people and preaching we are told that *they* brought Him a demon possessed man who was also blind. Now the question has to be asked, “Who are *they*?” Would it surprise you if the “*they*” who brought this individual to Jesus was none other than the same religious leaders who began plotting to kill Jesus earlier in Matthew 12:14? I believe that this is the case. And, should we not rejoice in our Lord that He continued to do what was right and to do the very thing He was called to do in spite of the growing hostility, opposition and pressure coming at Him from the religious establishment? We praise Him because He never ceased doing what was right no matter the risk!

In 12:23 the joyous response of the people is recorded. They see what great things Jesus has done and are astonished! And with seeming certainty as to the answer they asked if this could be the Son of David. They saw Jesus performing works that were so gracious and so beneficial to the people that it could only be concluded that the promised heir to David’s throne was among them! These simple people knew their Scripture well enough to bring to mind the prophet’s promise to David in 2 Samuel 7 that an heir would come through his line, whose kingdom would be established forever! Therefore, the hope of the people was that God’s Messiah had come in the person of Jesus Christ!

Matthew 12:22-24: Jesus is Accused of being a Devil. As the people praised the work of Jesus the religious leaders recoiled against the hope of the people; these wicked men slanderously attributed the work of our Lord to the devil. They said, “It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons that this fellow drives out demons.” The very men who should have known who Jesus was, instead knew Him not! They were quick to call Jesus all kinds of names. These men were spokesmen for the devil himself as they accused Jesus of being a devil. What is worse—in their arrogance, they attributed the works of God to the devil and in so doing denied the clear evidence that the works and miracles done by Jesus were clearly works that Scripture attributed only to God! (For more on this see John 9:31-33 and Ps. 146:8; Is. 32:1-3; Is. 35:4-6; Is. 42:1-8, 18-19, etc., etc.!!)

We can draw some pointed application out of these short verses. One, we should readily observe that the words that come out of our mouths reveal what is the condition of our hearts (Mt. 12:34b) toward God and toward people. And, two, speaking rashly and unwisely can eventually set in motion destructive patterns of thinking and living that can bring great harm to our lives. We would do well to monitor our words. A good prayer to pray regarding our thoughts and speech is found both in Psalm 19:14 and Psalm 141:3-4!

Matthew 12:25-37: Jesus Answers the Accusation. Jesus’ answer perfectly exposes the ungodly bias of the religious leaders. Using profound logic Jesus confronts the absurd nature of their accusation by first asking them how could it be that Satan would *defeat* himself (v26); second by inference He causes them to concede that it is inevitable that He drives out demons by the power of God (v27); and third, He forces them to consider that His works are of God and are works assigned to Messiah, which means, therefore, that the “kingdom of God has come upon you.” (v28).

To those who would receive it His logic would cause faith in Him to increase. But just in case the religious leaders were continuing to be resistant He warns them of continuing to harden their hearts against the clear evidence before them. For, though they had Jesus in their sights, they were accusing God the Holy Spirit of doing the works of the devil. This is the blasphemy that is unforgivable. We can’t know if someone has committed this sin. But we can say with assurance that if you are concerned that perhaps you have committed the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit then you haven’t, because if you had you wouldn’t even be thinking about it; this concern wouldn’t even cross your mind, nor would you care.

Matthew 12:28-35: Jesus Provides Good News. The biased and hostile words of the Pharisees toward Jesus left no room for them to receive the good news Jesus spoke. But to some, to those who would hear, His words were cause for hope! Imagine being one of the few in the crowd whose heart would be overflowing with anticipation as you listened to Jesus speak with profound logic against the skeptical religious leaders. You wouldn’t miss what He was saying in 12:28. He said, “If I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.” His message would be good and it would be clear! You would say to yourself, “Here, in this man before us, is the Lord! Here is *ha-Mashiach* (The Messiah)! You would hear Him saying in 12:29 that these works of His were destroying the works of the devil (1 Jn. 3:8). And, even though you would hear the warning about the unforgivable sin (v.32), you would also hear that your former rejection of Jesus and your unbelief would be forgiven as you receive Him—Jesus, the Son of Man (when Jesus calls Himself “Son of Man” He is claiming that He is God the Son! See Daniel 7:13-14 and Mt. 26:64), the Son of God!

The bottom line is that for some people Jesus’ message brings judgment, but also salvation for all who believe! This is what makes these passages so rich and worthy of our time spent in study and meditation.

Questions for Matthew 12:38-50: "Jesus Narrows The Way!"

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

Introduction to Matthew 12:38-50: The religious people in Jesus' day like to be entertained by the fantastic and amazing. They wanted Jesus do what they wanted Him to do when they wanted Him to do it (12:38)! But not only did the religious people want Jesus to operate on their own terms but so did His family. We kind of do the same thing with Jesus. But like they had to learn, and so do we, Jesus doesn't operate on our terms. In fact, in this lesson we see Jesus increasingly narrowing the way to God by first expanding the revelation of Himself. Second He warns the religious people about the dangers of empty reformation. And third He narrows the way to God by simply the unique and exclusive nature of relationship with Himself!

2. Read Matthew 12:38-42. "An Expanding Revelation" **A)** What did the religious leaders want Jesus to do and what was His answer to them? **B)** Do you think that former miracles performed by Jesus were "miraculous signs"? **C)** What would the "miraculous signs" point too? **D)** What "sign" did Jesus promise to give them? What will the "sign" ultimately prove to them about Jesus? **E)** Read 12:42. What is Jesus inferring about the attitude of the religious leaders toward Him by using the historic event of the Queen of the South eagerly coming to "listen to Solomon" speak in great wisdom? **F)** If Solomon was sought out because of His wisdom, then how should these people be acting toward Jesus? Why? What reason does Jesus give? (v42)

3. Read Matthew 12:43-45: "An Empty Reformation" Note: Jesus addressed a "people" whose history of reformation was cyclical: They would sin against God; God would confront them through "Judges"; they would reform their ways; then repeat it over and again. **A)** How does Jesus describe an empty reformation in these verses? List the sequence of events. **B)** What does Jesus leave out of the process, which indicates that He is warning them against simply trying to "turn over a new leaf"? (see Ezekiel 36:26-27; John 3:3,6-8,15,16; 2 Cor. 5:17; Titus 3:4-7 **C)** How do these verses listed in part "B" help you? **D)** What, then, is the greatest need of people in our world today? **E)** Let's apply 12:45: Why is "behavioral modification" so dangerous when the Gospel is not present? **F)** Can you think of ways that "we" try to "reform" people? What are the results? What is truly needed for true and lasting "reformation"?

4. Read Matthew 12:46-50: "An Extraordinary Relationship" **A)** Look up Mark 3:21 then come back to 12:46-47. What do you find surprising, interesting or disturbing about this scene? **B)** Which relationship is permanent? Which is to be preferred? **C)** Read 12:50. Would you agree or disagree that the phrase "do the will" or "does the will" of My Father in heaven means to "obey that which God requires"? If so, then according to John 6:29, what is the "will of God" for you and other people? **D)** If the permanent family of God consists of those who have believed on the Lord Jesus and have been "born again" then how important should our relationships with fellow Christians be? **E)** How important have the relationship you have with members of your church been to you? Why?