

The danger of disregarding Jesus

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[0:00] Now, Sarah's going to come and read for us. The text is in the Gospel of Matthew. We're back in Matthew chapter 12, verse 15.

You'll find it on page 977. If you're using a church Bible, thank you, Sarah. So, this is just after the Pharisees are plotting how they might kill Jesus.

Aware of this, Jesus withdrew from that place. A large crowd followed him, and he healed all who were ill. He warned them not to tell others about him.

This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah. 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.

He will not quarrel or cry out. No one will hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out.

[1:08] Till he has brought justice to victory. In his name, the nations will put their hope. 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.

The people were astonished and said, Could this be the son of David? But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons.

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.

If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? And if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your people drive them out?

So then, they will be your judges. But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man?

[2:31] Then he can plunder his house. Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. And so I tell you, Every kind of sin and slander can be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.

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.

So we're back in Matthew 12, page 977, looking at that chapter. And we're really thinking about the danger of disregarding Jesus this evening.

But maybe we can begin picturing Matthew, the gospel writer. So these events have taken place, and about 30 years or so later, Matthew sits down to pen his account of the life of Jesus.

So he has his pen in one hand, he has his Old Testament scroll perhaps in the other. He's looking back, led by the Spirit on the events and the teaching of the life of Jesus.

[3:41] But he's also very aware of different reactions to Jesus. Matthew grew up at a time, and Jesus grew up at a time when there was a very enthusiastic movement among the Jews asking the question, when will the Lord return as King as He promised?

What will it be like? How will He come? And what will change? And of course, Matthew, because he knows Jesus, he knows the answer.

He knows that God has come in His Son, the Lord Jesus. He is the promised King. And so we hear that, for example, in Matthew chapter 12, verse 28.

He remembers Jesus' words as he says, if it's by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. And as Matthew is aware that Jesus is the King, and he's looking into his Bible, he's asking himself, what Bible passage sums up Jesus' life and ministry?

And the Spirit leads him to Isaiah chapter 42. So we've got that lengthy quotation from one of the servant songs of Isaiah. And this is one thing that I want to remind us, to encourage us this evening, that what you and I need, whether we're Christians or not Christians, we need to see Jesus.

[5:03] And how do we see Jesus? We meet Him in His Word. And Matthew understands that, so he reads the Old Testament, and he sees Jesus. His friend, His Savior, His King.

And he understands that God has fulfilled His promise, the servant, the Lord, has come. So I don't know how everyone has come here this week. Perhaps some of us have had a very tough week. Perhaps some of us, we're struggling in our faith.

Perhaps we have questions about Christianity. What we need is to ask, Lord, show me Jesus. The Jesus that Matthew knew, and He reveals to us.

But again, as we think about Matthew writing his gospel, and as he looks back 30 years in the past, as he looks around his own society, there's an other influence that he's clearly aware of that's on his mind.

It's the influence of the Pharisees. We thought about this a bit last week. The religious leaders of the day, who are also firmly opposed to Jesus, therefore firmly opposed to God's kingdom of grace.

[6:08] And the pressure from these authorities, which began on Jesus, is now impressing itself on the church. They are under pressure.

And then there are the pressures from the Roman Empire. And so as Matthew writes his gospel to the first generation of Christians, he's wanting them to see from his gospel that their verdict, their response to Jesus matters.

That what we're dealing with is life and death reality. And so this little text in Matthew, it reminds us what's at stake for us personally as we consider Jesus.

It reminds us what's at stake for the people around us, for the people that we love when we think about Jesus and response to Him. And it also reminds us of the significance of our mission, the mission of the church, that as God's people we are called to.

We proclaim Christ and His good news and we call people to response. And so our text really invites us to do two things. It invites us to consider the character of Christ and it invites us to consider the cost of rejecting Christ.

[7:19] And what I hope we can see is that because Jesus is God's beloved Son, because He is the servant King, to disregard Him in our lives is disaster.

But let's begin focusing our attention on the character of Christ, especially here in verses 15 to 21. But just to recognize the context Sarah reminded us, it starts with verse 14, the Pharisees are plotting to kill Jesus.

And then as we get to verse 15, we see Jesus is doing ministry, but then He's warning people not to tell others about Him. So we know that this is also a time when people have false expectations and misunderstandings about Jesus.

So you've got Pharisees who are plotting and you've got people with false expectation. And in the middle of that, we've got Jesus and He's loving people and He's healing people and He's showing us what the kingdom of God is like, but He's also saying, be quiet.

Because people need to understand who Jesus really is. And at that point, for so many, they had a false view of some kind of political revolutionary Messiah. And maybe when we think about that, it reminds us of the importance of which voice we listen to when it comes to truths about Jesus.

[8:43] That we don't listen to the world's opinions. We don't even settle for the faith of our parents. We don't even stop at certain truths about Jesus.

We need to get to know Jesus personally. It's one of the reasons we come to church. That we would have a personal encounter with the Lord Jesus in His Word.

It's one of the great privileges that we have whenever we open God's Word in our home, individually or as families. We get to encounter Jesus to hear Him speak.

And I think it's really important to remember that and to ask ourselves, are we enjoying time with Jesus day by day? And to help us, Matthew highlights four things that we can know about Jesus, Matthew's friend and Matthew's king and Matthew's savior.

And here's the first thing for us to remember as we think about the character of Christ. First, that Jesus is God's beloved son. Look at verse 18.

[9:47] And this is from the beginning of Isaiah 42. Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love in whom I delight. That's God's verdict on Jesus.

And you know, Matthew has heard personally God's verdict on Jesus. Because remember, Matthew was there when Jesus was baptized. And when Jesus came out of the water and the spirit came down and the voice from heaven, this is my son and I love him.

And Matthew was also a friend of James and Peter and John. And so after Jesus has risen from the dead, they get told about the transfiguration, that point up the mountain where Jesus shone with the glory of God.

And as Jesus is shining with the glory of God, there's the voice from heaven. There's the father. This is my son. I love him. Listen to him. And then Matthew, as he thinks about that, he turns to Isaiah 42.

And it captures the reality that he's come to know that God the Father has joy in God the Son. That as God the Father looks upon Jesus' life on this earth, he is well pleased.

[11:03] He is well pleased with Jesus' perfect obedience at all stages in his life. When he is 12 years old and he says to his anxious parents, I must be in my father's house.

And we know that Jesus lived his life being about his father's business. We know that the obedience of Jesus led him always to resist temptation, intense temptation that would only grow more intense because he never caved in.

The father has joy in Jesus because of his perfect love. We've been thinking about the perfect love of Jesus when we heard him in the last chapter, chapter 11, verse 28, inviting people to find the rest of God, to find God's rest in knowing Jesus as Savior.

We see Jesus displaying the perfect love of God the Father when he brings healing as he does here. When he shows compassion on the crowds, go back to chapter 9, verse 36, it's Jesus' compassion on helpless people who are looking for God, but they don't know that Jesus is God's King that leads him to send the disciples on mission.

And the father is pleased with the love and the compassion of his son, Jesus. And so he tells his story. At the same time that there are some, the Pharisees, who want to destroy Jesus, and there's many that are captured as willing to dismiss Jesus as an irrelevance, he tells us God the Father, he delights in Jesus, his beloved son.

[12:46] And I think the encouragement for us as Christians is the invitation that we have to get into the gospels to get to know Jesus better, that we would share the father's delight in Jesus, the son, that we would learn to call precious what God calls precious.

He delights in Jesus and we're invited to do the same. So Jesus is God's beloved son. We also are told here that Jesus is God's suffering servant.

It's there in verse 18. Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love in whom I delight. And the servant songs in the book of Isaiah become a great hope that one day a Messiah will come, that redemption and rescue and deliverance and peace will come.

And so the question that's being asked in the first century in Jerusalem and beyond is what will it look like when God comes and acts as he's promised? What will this rescue be like?

What will it look like when God's king comes to establish his kingdom, to bless the nations as he's promised? Well, what answer does Matthew offer?

[14:09] What answer do the gospels offer as they present us Jesus? It looks like a humble servant who is ready and willing to heal the despised, to care for those society has cast aside, to welcome the excluded, and to demonstrate mercy.

And if we know our Bibles and we know our gospels, our minds will perhaps go to some of those stories where Jesus extends the mercy and grace of God. Perhaps we think of his encounter with the woman at the well, that notorious sinner, and he shares deep theology, but ultimately he identifies himself as the promised one, the source of living water.

Or perhaps we think about how Jesus showed mercy to people from the wrong places. Earlier in this gospel, a centurion's faith is honored.

I've not met faith like this anywhere in Israel. There'll be people who'll come from north and south and east and west and they'll be part of the kingdom. Well, those who had the Old Testament, those who should have seen the Messiah, they're going to miss out.

Jesus showed mercy to people with the wrong look, people with leprosy, people with withered hands. When the king comes, when the servant comes, it looks like a figure riding into Jerusalem on a donkey.

[15:48] ruling in humility for humble people. It looks like a king come to establish God's kingdom by way of sacrifice and self-giving and a death on the cross.

And it looks like what we read about in verses 19 and 20. This servant, this one, this spirit-filled one, he will not quarrel or cry out. No one will hear his voice in the streets.

A bruised reed he will not break and a smoldering wick he'll not snuff out till he's brought justice through to victory. It looks like gentleness and compassion. It looks like a Messiah who is so patient with weak faith, who is so patient with Matthew and the other disciples in all of their misunderstanding.

It looks like a Savior who will not despise fragile faith, but who honors and protects all of his own.

I have a friend who used to work for, in Midlothian, the mobile library service. And on day one of his work, he thought it was the only day of his work because on day one, he crashed the van.

[17 : 06] And so he had that fear all day long. What's going to happen when I get back to the depot and I have to tell my boss what's happened? So at the end of the day, he went in with great fear and trepidation, expecting the worst, only to be told, it's no problem, these things happen.

Now imagine the relief to be met with gentleness and mercy. It's exactly what we find from the heart of Jesus.

And it's the encouragement that we've been hearing from Jesus. It's that encouragement of chapter 11, verse 28. Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

We're invited to remember the heart of Jesus. Remember he described his heart in verse 29 of chapter 11. I am gentle and humble in heart. And the most common emotion that Jesus shows in the Gospels is the compassion of God.

And that's so important for us to remember as the people of God because I think it's really easy for us to despise ourselves when we fail and fall short. It's really easy to beat ourselves up, never mind looking outside at others.

[18 : 27] But our Jesus, he is gentle with us, and he doesn't despise weak faith. And what we discover wonderfully is that our sin and our suffering, it actually draws out more of Jesus' heart to us to meet our needs.

So he is the beloved son and he is the suffering servant. And here in Matthew chapter 12, we also discover more of the character of Christ as he is announced to be the light to the nations.

That's part of Isaiah's phrase about this coming servant. Now Matthew doesn't quote as far as verse 6 of chapter 42, but if he did, that's what we would hear.

If he'd quoted from Isaiah chapter 49 about the servant, we would hear that it wasn't enough just for this servant to come and be a light for the Jews. He had to be a light to the Gentiles also.

So there is something in the character of this one, this Jesus, that represents good news for all peoples. And here we have it at the end of verse 18.

[19 : 38] This spirit-filled one, he will proclaim justice to the nations. And in verse 21, we see how wide the welcome is.

In his name, the nations will put their hope. So when God sends his king to establish his kingdom, the promise reaches beyond just that small portion of Israel.

It extends to all the nations of the earth. The call of Jesus, the good shepherd. Remember when he said, I have sheep that are not in this sheepfold, but I must call them and they must come in too so that there be one flock and one shepherd.

Or if you were here this morning and we were in the story of Abraham, Abraham gets that promise that someone from his family line will be a source of blessing to all the nations.

It all flows from Jesus, the one who declares himself to be the light of the world. And what we discover about Jesus is someone who, as it were, rolls out the welcome mat.

[20 : 51] Not just for the elite or not just for certain types of people who might make the cut the way, you know, a Hollywood red carpet event works. He extends a welcome and offers hope to all.

It's often said that Matthew is the most Jewish of all the gospel writers, but we still have significant hints within Matthew's gospel that he understands the good news of Jesus is universal.

So the first worshippers, and we think about it most Christmases, the first worshippers of Jesus we find in Matthew's gospel, it's the Magi from the east. We spoke about the centurion's faith, the one who was honoured when he said to Jesus, Jesus you don't even need to come to my house to heal my servant, just say the word and he'll be healed and his faith is honoured.

Or we think about Jesus crossing the sea to heal the demon possessed. Matthew's gospel tells us that Jesus is for all nations and all people and of course think about when Matthew is writing, he's writing now maybe in the mid-60s by which point the spirit has come first on the apostles and then

on the church and the church has been sent out on that great commission and the church is both announcing and showing the saving reign of Jesus that faith in Jesus transforms lives and builds a new community a new society and that movement is going as Jesus said it would from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

Why is this good news? Well it's good news for us personally if we've received this message because it reminds us just how wide and inclusive the gospel message is.

[22 : 46] Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved. But it's also hugely important for our mission that this is saying to us we can go anywhere to anyone from any place and say to them Christ Jesus has died for you.

Christ Jesus is the saviour that you need regardless of a background regardless of language or culture. And of course it's realities like these as well that matter for global mission.

Jesus has now returned to heaven but he's continuing to do his work. As he sends the spirit the spirit fills his people the spirit fills the church and the church proclaims Christ.

And so John Piper is somebody who writes a lot about mission and he would say that every Christian is called to either go on mission or to pray and to support mission or being disobedient. And it's the reality of Jesus being light to all the nations that makes that so. And it also matters then for our gospel welcome.

[23 : 57] It's one of the wonderful things about this time of year isn't it? When the whole nation seem to be gathering in Edinburgh it should be the case that anybody should be able to walk in through those doors and feel welcome.

to feel the welcome to belong before they believe. And there should be something in the loving welcome of the church that should help someone to believe.

To make the message of the gospel seem more credible. Because someone should come into a church and see here's a group of people and they look very different and they seem to come from different places and they're from different ages and stages but they love one another and they're kind to each other and they practice generosity together and so we're breaking down some barriers perhaps so that people might be more open to our message.

Because we remember that every local church has a mission. We have a mission here in Becloud. Galashiels has a mission to make Jesus known, to make his message intelligible and credible and desirable for the communities in which God has placed us.

So Matthew is reminding us, Jesus is the beloved son, he is the servant, he is the light to the nations and he's also the king of grace.

[25 : 33] Many of Matthew's contemporaries as we said, they had a particular expectation for what a Messiah would be like. They're expecting political hero, they're expecting overthrow, they're expecting the establishment of a new order.

And perhaps it's a natural expectation that we have. Often it's the way the world works. If you have a powerful role, then you may well be tempted to operate by force of will or even the force of arms. Look with me at verses 22 and 23 and see just how different Jesus is. Then they brought Jesus, a demon possessed man who was blind and mute and Jesus healed him so that he could both talk and see.

All the people were astonished and said, could this be the son of David? Jesus is a remarkably powerful figure doing remarkable things and he has this powerful, remarkable title.

Son of David was the great hope that in the future someone would come and he'd be God's king, that God would rule through his chosen king and people are beginning to ask, is it Jesus?

[26 : 47] But just recognize, how does Jesus use his power? How does he use this role which is his role? Well, he uses it to extend God's grace. He uses it to show healing and deliverance.

He will use it to bring forgiveness and to display mercy and to give people hope. And because this is true, because Jesus is both wonderfully powerful and at the same time wonderfully loving, you and I can trust him.

Here is one power figure who will never exploit or abuse his role or his people. And so we can submit to him knowing it's for our good.

So we can gladly seek his kingdom. So Matthew has been showing us the character of Christ to help us to see this is why it would be so dangerous to disregard and ignore Jesus, simply because he is so good, because he is so wonderful and loving and to miss out on this one would be to miss out on so much.

But he gives a second answer about the danger of disregarding Jesus, and now the tone changes as he focuses on the cost of rejecting Christ, from verse 24 onwards.

[28 : 21] I suspect we all have this kind of person in our lives, the kind of person that we would say of them, well they wouldn't hurt a fly, or nobody has a bad word to say about them, they're always ready to help others.

The kind of person you want to be with, perhaps the kind of person you want to be when you grow up. So imagine that's your friend, and you know so many wonderful things about him, and you meet someone else, and at the very mention of their name, you can see a person's blood boil And their fists clench, and what they speak of that person is hate and anger.

We'd be shocked, wouldn't we? confused. Matthew has been introducing Jesus to us, the real Jesus, the personal Jesus, full of love and compassion, doing good and bringing grace, but the Pharisees, verse 14, plotting how they may kill Jesus, verse 22, what's their verdict on Jesus? It's only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons. What's going on here? As J.C. Ryle puts it, it's the human heart showing its true colors in rejecting God and his chosen servant.

And this little section reminds us that to disregard Jesus has eternal consequences. And I think it's important for us to remember that, that we would guard our own hearts, that if we're Christians, we'd want to walk closely with Jesus, and we'd want to pray for others knowing this to be true.

[29 : 58] So as we think very briefly about Jesus' dialogue with the Pharisees, notice again, first of all, that the identity question comes up. Verses 25 to 29, the question is really, well, whose kingdom is Jesus in?

Because they have said very clearly, well, we think Jesus is working and siding with Satan. And so Jesus takes the time to expose their faulty logic, that a house divided against itself can't stand, that makes no sense.

He makes plain that Jesus is working against the kingdom of darkness, he's standing against Satan, he is the strong man who ties up Satan so that he can bring people from that kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God.

And so to get that wrong is hugely important. And Jesus says as much very directly in verse 30 when he says, whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.

Inviting everyone to consider, well, whose side are we on? To recognize that no one is a spiritual Switzerland, we're either for or we're against Jesus. Or as he puts it, we're either gathering people into the kingdom of God as we are gathered ourselves, or we're scattering.

[31 : 24] And so Jesus' warning is clear. We must take him and his claims seriously. We must examine what the Bible says for our verdict, and we must follow where the evidence leads, and we must nail our colors to the mast as we respond with faith.

But he doesn't just stop at the identity question, he also moves on to the destiny question. There's a very sobering reality, isn't there, in verses 31 and 32, when Jesus makes plain that there is a sin that won't be forgiven, there's a heart attitude towards Jesus that leads to eternal punishment.

Verse 31, so I tell you, every kind of sin and slander can be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. 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.

It's a kind of saying of Jesus we need to be very careful with. We need to be careful about tender consciences. first of all, what is Jesus not saying? He's not saying if we ever say a bad word about Jesus, then we can't be forgiven.

We only need to look as far as Peter, the disciple, to see that. Remember Peter calling down curses on himself. I don't know that man.

[32 : 50] So it's not that. Nor is it all unbelief and opposition to Jesus. Think about Paul, the great apostle. Before Jesus met him on the Damascus road, he hated and despised Jesus and the church.

And later he would look back and say, I'm the chief of sinners. But I acted in ignorance. So it's not that either. Maybe to begin to get to what he's talking about, think about what the Pharisees are doing.

So here they are, they have front row seats to the life and ministry of Jesus. They hear his teaching, they see his miracles, they see his character, and they see the Spirit working in and through Jesus. And we're told that the Father has pleasure in Jesus and he comes according to the Father's plan and their verdict is Jesus is satanic. Jesus is part of the devil's kingdom.

And so they continue this public persistent attack. They are turned against Jesus and they're turning others against Jesus. Remember, even as Jesus is being put on trial, they're stirring up the crowd.

[34:07] Away with this man, crucify him. And so this is public determination to reject what they see, to attribute evil to what is good, to deny the truth of the gospel.

But there is within this a warning, isn't there, that to say no to what we're told of Jesus and the gospel, if we never turn away from sin to trust in him, if we never change, and follow, then there can be no forgiveness.

And so if we're here and we're not yet a Christian, that's something that we must do, we must humble ourselves to turn to trust in Jesus and to do it as a matter of urgency.

So Matthew writes to warn us by looking at the Pharisees here, that disregarding Jesus is dangerous because of who Jesus is, because of what we would miss, because he is so precious, he is so good, to miss him would be to miss everything.

But then there's also the other side, that it's dangerous to disregard Jesus because of the eternal cost of ignoring him and his claims. We thought this morning about the Titanic.

[35:30] On the night that Titanic sank, there were six iceberg warnings that came in. Now some of them were missed, others were simply ignored, and we know how that finished.

And so we recognize that the importance of not ignoring Jesus, of not ignoring his warnings, of not ignoring his promise of salvation, rather to come to find life and joy and rest in him.

Let's pray together. Lord God, we thank you for the way Matthew could write of his friend, of his savior, of his king, to look through the pages of the Bible and to see Jesus fulfilling that great prophecy of Isaiah 42.

We thank you for sending Jesus to be such a humble, suffering servant, to be willing to wash his disciples' feet, to be willing to wash us clean of our sin, by his death on the cross.

We thank you that he is a king, but he is a king marked by grace. We thank you for how tender and gentle he is with us when our faith is weak.

[36:46] We thank you that he is the one who will hold us fast. We thank you for the good news that Jesus isn't just for some people, but for all people, so we can have confidence in proclaiming Christ as Lord.

And we pray too that you would remind us how important it is, how eternally important it is to get our response to Jesus right. Help us and teach us, we ask in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen.