

Matthew 12:22–37

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Date: 25 June 2023

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[0 : 00] Matthew 12, 22-37 Matthew 12, 23-37 Matthew 12, 23-37

Matthew 12, 24-37 For the tree is known by its fruit.

You brood of vipers, how can you speak good when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil.

I tell you, on the day of judgment, people will give an account for every careless word they speak. For by your words, you will be justified, and by your words, you will be condemned.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Well, I was a child of rock and roll, and I recall, I think it was 1969, some of you hip-hop guys like Milton even know this song, done by Peter Townsend for The Who, The Pinball Wizard.

[3 : 06] Elk John would later cover it and kind of just kill it forever. The Pinball Wizard is a song about a dumb, deaf, and blind kid who sure knows how to play pinball.

In fact, this kid was so good that he was better than everyone who had the advantage of hearing and seeing and speaking.

How is that possible? The lyrics of Townsend roll it out this way. Ain't got no distractions. Can't hear no buzzers and bells. Don't see no lights of flashing.

Plays a sense of smell. Always gets a replay. Never seen him fall. The deaf, dumb, and blind kid sure plays a... Man, are you all so young you don't know that one yet?

According to Who's classic single released on vinyl, being blind or even dumb doesn't mean that you're destitute.

[4 : 19] Let me put it a couple different ways. Having full use of your senses doesn't always mean you are advantaged. Let me keep it moving.

At times, those who have working eyes and ears and mouths are disadvantaged. Even the Bible persistently makes use of this truth, especially in reference to our spiritual condition.

Physical ailments in one person are often, in the scriptures, amplifying heart issues that are in another. Someone's external condition puts the spiritual condition of another on full display.

And so we come to our text today. You can see it for yourself. Take a look. Verse 22. Then a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, could not speak, could not see, was brought to him.

That is Jesus. And he healed him so that the man saw and spoke. Jesus heals a blind and mute man.

[5 : 24] Mark this now at the outset of the message. It is the religious leaders who follow in the text who cannot see and are condemned for what they say.

The question for you, the question for me as we give ourselves to God's word for this family on this week is this. What are you saying about all Matthew has been showing?

Yeah, let me put it a little more in the vernacular of the text. What are you saying about all that you're seeing? Yeah.

Have I titled it? It's this. What say you? Well, in the text, a couple things are being said.

First, by what the people say. We'll see that in 23. Then by what the Pharisees say. You'll see that in 24. And then Jesus is going to have his say for the remainder.

[6 : 30] But believe me, this thing's going to fall at the end on what say you. What was being said then about Jesus at this point in his ministry?

Well, from the people's mouth. Verse 23. And all the people were amazed and said, Can this be the son of David? That's the response when they saw Jesus heal a man who was blind and incapable of speaking.

Now, if you're not familiar with the scriptures, and I know many of us aren't, this seems like a rather strange phrase. Can this be the son of David? Give me just a second to explain it.

This is actually the very thing that Matthew was arguing for in his opening line. He wanted to tell you good news about Jesus who was the son of David, son of Abraham.

So now for 12 chapters, Matthew's been trying to explain that Jesus is fulfilling, in some measure, the expectation of that title. Put it on your t-shirt.

[7 : 36] Son of David. And he has Jesus wearing that. What does it mean? There was a widely held conviction among Jewish people in the first century that God would come in fulfillment of scripture's promises through a son who was in the line of the most lauded king, David.

And that when that son came, he would put things straight in the world. So what they are saying, if you're not familiar with the scriptures, is can this be the coming one who was promised to make things right once and forevermore?

2 Samuel 7, verse 9, must have been in their mind that promised to David that he would have a descendant after he died who would be raised up and sit on the throne forever.

Isaiah 9, verse 2, when you're finding the people living in the time of darkness and blindness, it says one's going to come like a wonderful counselor, a mighty God.

He's going to be one that sits on the throne of David forever. We could run through Ezekiel. We could run through Hosea. We could run through Amos. In the first century milieu, if you were Jewish, you were waiting for God's promises in the son of David to be fulfilled.

[9 : 04] And when that son of David came, well, what would have been going on? These kinds of things that we see. Isaiah 35, 5 and 6 reads, Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.

It's all there. So now they're standing there on a day that they can't believe it. I'm seeing a blind man see and a mute man speak.

Can this be Jesus, the son of David, who comes to put the world right? Let me put it to you this way. The expectation was in the air, and they were witnessing something that you and I have never witnessed. And so they wondered. What say you?

Are you at least wondering? Are you at least open-minded? That seems to be where the people were at this point. Open-minded. Can Jesus actually be the one that God has been pointing to in the world in order to set things right for my life?

[10 : 26] What are you saying? About all you're seeing. You know, for Christians, and let me just address Christians here for a moment, these kinds of things are encouraging, are they not?

I mean, I find it encouraging to go back to those ancient texts that were set down long before Jesus came along and have some inscripturated hope that this kind of thing might happen one day.

And there it is. And the promises of the Old Testament scriptures seem to be in play with this figure that lived in the first century that Matthew wants you and me to know about.

I find it encouraging. At times, it's the only thing that keeps me in the Christian faith. Yes, I believe. Why? Because every time I open the fullness of the scriptures, I see the unity and the intersectionality of this around the person of Jesus.

And there is nothing other than that that would explain this to be true for me than that. I find it encouraging. I hope some of you are not only open-minded, but that your mind is filled as you're hearing this word from me this morning.

[11 : 42] But the people aren't the only ones who respond, are they? The people's response is followed by the Pharisees. There it is, verse 24. But when the Pharisees heard it, they said it's only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons.

In contrast to the people who are open-minded, the Pharisees at this point already, we don't have to wait until chapter 25 and 26, the Pharisees are already closed-minded.

Closed-minded. In contrast to thinking perhaps the son of David is here, they actually say, no, this is the prince of demons. I mean, you can't really get two more contrasting titles.

Son of David, fulfillment of all these promises to get something right. Prince of demons, who keeps messing with my life and getting everything else here wrong.

Let me put it this way. The Pharisees' verdict on Jesus is already here. You're not even halfway through the book. The verdict's in.

[12 : 55] They went to the polling place. Their vote has been cast. I'll have nothing to do with Jesus. Two groups then.

They saw the same thing and they drew drastically different conclusions. Oh, now come on. Isn't that exactly what you expect in life? Isn't that what happens in life? Various people encounter the same thing and see something and decide something totally different.

I was reading one-to-one this week with a friend in the congregation. We've been going through Mark together and we had a great time talking about chapter three this week where we saw this variety of responses to the ministry of Jesus.

Some of the people were just indifferent, just like today, right? I mean, why are there so few people in this city on a Sunday wanting a sermon?

Because they're just indifferent. I mean, the Medici bakery line might have already gone through this number by this hour. There's just an indifference.

[14:16] But beyond that, that's not the only response. Some people, even in Matthew 3, were claiming for themselves things they could get in Jesus' name.

Isn't that just what we see today? I'm going to go to Jesus to leverage that thing, that entity, that ideal, that person for something that I need. The crowds were following them just so they could get what they wanted out of life.

And so it's this kind of really short, short-term need relationship with Jesus. Jesus, help me. Oh, Jesus. But by help, we simply mean, get me through dinner.

The other people, though, thought he was crazy. His family actually came to him and said, he's kind of out of his mind. He's kind of gone overboard. There's too much spirituality going on. The guy's not even taking time to eat.

He needs a break. Give him a vacation. Put him on sabbatical. Give him a rest. Stand somebody else up. We're going to go get him. We're going to do a family intervention. Jesus has gotten hold of himself in too big a way.

[15:21] That's another reaction. But the Pharisees were there too. Nah, nah. We think this is all bad. The devil's at work on this one. And then there's that final group in Mark 3.

I know I'm doing an extended illustration so that you can see the variety of responses because I'm hoping that one of these responses hits you. There's actually, who are my brothers and sisters? But these who sit around me, listen to me, says Jesus. They're all indicating what you say. Are you indifferent?

Do you just use him? Do you think he's just kind of fanatical? Do you want to hear what he has to say? Are you willing to understand what he has to teach?

Do you think he's actually the source of the problems? Do you really think that the world would be a heck of a lot better off if we could get rid of Jesus and Christian teaching?

[16:25] It's all there. Interestingly, the choice then comes to you and me as well.

This is an important choice. This repetitive refrain this morning, what say you? A 20th century writer put your choice this way.

A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things that Jesus said could certainly not be limited to being called a great moral teacher.

To say what Jesus said, he would either be a lunatic or on the level with a man who says he's a poached egg. Met a few of those, haven't you? Or else he'd be the devil of hell, said this writer. You must make your choice. Either this man was and is the son of God or else he's a madman or else he's something worse. And today, everyone's making their decision. Everyone.

[17:24] You might say, I didn't make a decision. You did then. Your decision is indifference. Today, many are even siding with the Pharisees.

There's a modern-day atheist. I'm not even sure if he's still living or not. Christopher Hitchens. He says, how is it moral?

Speaking of things Jesus says, how is it moral to claim a monopoly on access to heaven or to threaten wavers with everlasting fire, let alone to condemn fig trees and persuade devils to infest the bodies of pigs?

Such a person, if not divine, would be a sorcerer and a fanatic. If you had been a religious leader in that time, what would you be saying about all that you're seeing?

Nah. You weren't and you aren't. But what are you saying about all that you're reading? There are at least those two things being going on in the text.

[18:34] And they provide you then with the movement of the text where Jesus responds to what is being said. Don't you see that? I hope you have it on your phone or in front of you in a larger text

where you can take in more.

But in verses 25, all the way through the end of the reading today, 37, Jesus is responding to what people are saying about all they were seeing.

That's a lot of text though, isn't it? I don't even want to read it all because you'll just, you'll say, well, this is too much for me to handle on a Sunday morning.

So let me break it down. Let me signpost Jesus' response to what people say. I want to do this to be very clear and simple.

Take a look. He first makes a common sense argument. I'll come back to it. Because it's followed by a supporting analogy, an analogy that he thinks supports his argument, which then is followed by his application, both to people in general and to the Pharisees in particular.

[19:49] Can you hear that in your mind? As you look at all those verses that are rolling before you, there's a common sense argument, followed by a supporting analogy with application, both for people and particularly for those Pharisees.

What's the common sense argument? Well, it's right there. Verse 25. Knowing their thoughts, he said to them, every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand.

And then notice these two, and if. He's just elaborating on his argument. And if Satan casts out Satan, he's divided against himself, how then will his kingdom stand? And if. I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out?

Therefore they will be your judges. He's basically saying common sense, and if, and if. Common sense. Satan's not going to come around to try to undo Satan. Lincoln picks up on this, doesn't he? The Civil War. Speaking on national terms. Slavery. The great early and yet to be resolved issue that we wrestle with as a country.

[21:01] A house divided against itself cannot stand. He knew. He knew. Well, imagine in spiritual terms, this is what Jesus is saying. What he's saying is, if I'm actually here doing the work of Satan by releasing this guy from blindness and muteness, then I am undoing the very captivity I'm trying to keep people under.

Common sense. Jesus basically says, you're not making sense. Then he says, let me give you an analogy. He puts it right there in 29.

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. Whoever is not with me is against me. Whoever does not gather with me scatters.

It's just this analogy that says, if that doesn't make sense, don't you think this makes more sense? Doesn't it make more sense that I might actually be God's representative to undo the unhealthy, unholy activity of Satan in the world and release people from bondage?

Wouldn't I then be like a man, son of man, son of David, son of Abraham, who goes into someone else's kingdom under their reign and says, enough!

[22:12] You're not destroying people any longer. I'm delivering them from you. It's just an analogy. And then comes the application.

You can just see it there. I mean, the writer almost wants you to see it. Verse 31, therefore, so you know the application's coming. Therefore, I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the spirit will not be forgiven.

And whoever speaks the 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 the age to come. He says, let me apply it to just everyday people.

Forgiveness is available for those who believe that the spirit of God can cleanse you from sins that keep you from God in and through the ministry of Jesus, son of God.

And that's why Jesus says, if you sin against me, you're going to get forgiven, but you sin against the spirit, well then there's really no ongoing help for you unless you're going to repent of that.

[23:27] Hey, let me put it to you in street language, right? How many of you have ever used Jesus Christ lost name in vain? Now come on, I'm not showing showing hands, but you know, I'm guessing, I'm guessing we've got a few.

In fact, we'll kind of lay it out there in sometimes the most incidental of times. Like, oh, I just kind of tripped over, tripped over a pebble and out comes his name.

I've got something that's driving me nuts at work and out comes his name. I've got a situation that's just unsolvable and out comes his name.

I denigrate his name, his name, his name. You've done it. I've done it. We've done it. And Jesus says, if you do it, still forgiveness for you.

Are you kidding me? Are you kidding me? But, says Jesus, you start deciding that the Spirit of God is not at work in the Son of God to make you children of God.

[24 : 37] Well then, where are you going to turn? Because without the Spirit, you don't get cleansed. Without the indwelling presence of water that washes your soul, you've got no hope.

And so there it is. It's a pretty strong application, isn't it, to the people. Persistent conviction that the Spirit of God is not at work and the Son of God will undo you now and forever.

Good thing is, you can change seats. You don't have to sit in the same seat your whole life. You might say, you know, I've been in that seat. I'm getting out of that seat. I'm going to sit in a different seat.

I'm going to believe that the Spirit of God is at work in the Son of God to make me a child of God. But then he applies it, doesn't he, to the Pharisees.

This is really fascinating to me. He's still talking to them. You can tell that by verse, oh, let me look. 34, that brood of vipers phrase.

[26 : 12] You, you nest of snakes, you. John the Baptist had thrown that out earlier. I think Jesus is borrowing off John's sermon. Jesus looks at these Pharisees and he says, hey, a good tree produces good fruit, bad tree produces bad fruit.

You, nest of snakes, you. How can you speak good when you're evil? In other words, all that you're saying about me being the son of Beelzebul and all that, you can't speak anything good because you're an evil man. You've got evil that's going to come out because evil is in.

He applies it to them. And look at this. This is fascinating when he speaks to them. He actually says, you are evil for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good.

The evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. They've had their verdict on Jesus. Jesus now casts his vote on them. But what say you?

Come on, let me land this thing. There's only two verses left. I tell you, on the day of judgment, people will give account for every careless word they speak for by your words you'll be justified and by your words you'll be condemned.

[27 : 27] What say you? Come on, stay with me. That little phrase, what say you, is so archaic we don't use it in the contemporary world, in the English language, save two contexts.

Law and legislation. ladies and gentlemen of the jury, having heard all the testimony, in regard to the case on so-and-so, as it relates to first-degree murder, what say you?

Verdict is what they're calling for. maybe you're in the city hall or down in Springfield or in the halls of Congress, sitting in a seat in Senate.

Those are the only places that comes, law and legislation. Would the gentlewoman of Madam of Illinois please stand in regard to the farm bill, which is going to be passed and is passed every year and must be passed, and it'll allocate all the funds for this.

What say you? And the individual will stand and say yea or nay. They legislate through word that casts a vote.

[28 : 47] You convict or acquit through word that makes a verdict. And what Jesus is saying here is, I tell you, on the day of judgment, people will give account for every word they speak for by your words you'll either be made righteous or by your words you'll be condemned.

This is fascinating to me. We're always thinking, are we not, that I'll get to heaven, but how do I know if I've ever done enough good works? I was just talking to a neighbor friend of mine recently. We were talking about another individual that had passed away and my neighbor friend looked at me and said, oh, but how do you really know if you've ever done enough good works? And I said, well, yeah, that's a great question.

How would we know? And we began to talk then about how far our good works can get us. But notice the text here. You get to the pearly gates.

St. Peter says, your time, walk in, stand up. There he is behind the bar. Almighty God, Son at the right hand. looks down, says, you're not going to say what say you now.

[30 : 06] He's going to say, what did you say? That's the import of Jesus' words here. For by your words you will be justified and by your words you will be condemned.

Listen, what you say in this life about Jesus will have eternal consequences for your life when you see Jesus.

That's what Jesus is saying. Your words are everything. Are everything.

So at this point in the gospel, we're only 12 chapters in, I'm in a jury room and we're all members of the jury. And before anybody votes, let's just go around.

Based on all you know to this point, Savior of sinners, son of the devil.

[31 : 12] I was thinking then about you hearing my words and I'd love to move you from being open-minded to open-hearted, open-mouthed.

I'd love to move you from being closed-minded to open-minded so that you might be open-mouthed. I'd love to think that you who have eyes to see aren't blind to what I say.

Perhaps your friend brought you here. Perhaps your family member brought you here. you've been hearing their words about Jesus.

What say you? Eternity.

You're going to be responsible for your eternal state. By your words, so let me tell you where to go because if I sit down without telling you where to go, I'm going to regret it all afternoon.

[32 : 59] The word is near you in your mouth and in your heart. That is the word of faith that we proclaim 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. For the scriptures say everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.

I'm giving you forever this morning. My word, I hope you take it.

Heavenly Father, we come to you today again listening to this portion of Matthew for the welfare of our own souls. for those who already believe and embrace you, may our words just resound in confident faith towards you.

For those who came this morning and are still wondering and open-minded, may they be convinced not by me but simply by the power of this word explained.

[34 : 27] And for those who need to make a decision today, Lord, help them decide. Help them decide long before we get to the end of Matthew. Certainly help them decide long before they look you in the face which may for some of us be even before we get to the end of Matthew.

In Jesus' name, Amen. Let's stand singing.