

Matthew 12:38–50

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[0 : 00] Matthew 12, verses 38 to 50. Matthew 12, verses 39 to 50.

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While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside asking to speak to him. But he replied to the man who told him, Who is my mother and who are my brothers?

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.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Amen. Well, good morning.

[2 : 07] Thank you for finding your way here to Christ Church Chicago. And it's great to see old friends, loved ones visiting. And we pray that you would be encouraged being together this morning.

Let me just take this verse to prayer. Father, we desire to be those who hear the word. Not only hear it, but understand it.

That we may bear fruit and yield in cases hundred, sixty, or thirtyfold. Help us to this end, we pray.

We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Recently, while wandering around town, I encountered a t-shirt that read, Come to the dark side.

We have cookies. Come to the dark side. We have cookies. Tempting, as that might be for some, for others more so, The Invitation plays off of arguably the most iconic film series in the world.

[3 : 20] The Star Wars series produced by George Lucas. In the series are various characters, plots, subplots, themes. But the most prevalent must be the theme of the battle between good and evil.

Repeatedly throughout the series, there is an invitation to various characters to come to the dark side. It's characterized by traits such as anger, wrath, pride, often represented or emblematic of evil.

And this morning, this is what I want to speak to you about. Evil. Specifically, the purpose of evil. What is it trying to do?

It's emerged in these texts, particularly this chapter specifically. Matthew, out of all New Testament writers, writes about evil more than anyone. Here in this chapter occurs the most in the 12th chapter.

And he's already, Jesus has already been shown or accused to be evil. The word is found itself repeatedly in verse 34, in verse 35, last week's text.

[4 : 42] And this morning as well. What does evil intend? I've tagged this sermon, the ambition of evil.

The ambition of evil. I've creatively, hopefully helpfully, painted three signs that lead us through this morning's text.

The first is, you will see one sign, followed by seven spirits, and finally many siblings. I alliterated, and the best I could do was signs, spirits, and siblings.

Signs, spirits, and siblings. We see one sign, verses 38 through 42. I want us to see that evil seeks to create unbelief and unrepentance in our hearts.

We've already seen from last week that evil reproduces itself, right? The good person out of the good treasure brings forth good. The evil person out of the evil treasure brings forth evil.

[5 : 51] And you see that in our world. generational sin, systemic sin, evil begets evil. And this week, we begin to see some other things.

The first is this. Evil seeks to create unbelief. The opposition toward Jesus is mounting. Jesus was undermining the religious authorities.

He was out teaching the best teachers. He was operating out of the bounds of their human established laws. The world of first century Judaism was unraveling.

And as a result of chapter, from chapter 12, verse 14, you see it. The plot reads, the Pharisees went out and conspired against him. How to destroy him. Now, it makes sense that any new kingdom would subvert an existing one.

Any regime change has naysayers. The scribes and the Pharisees now approach Jesus and ask him further to authenticate himself. Validate your ministry.

[6 : 54] Give us a sign. The request is a challenge for Jesus to give evidence of proof or proof of his identity. It reminds us of a temptation that Jesus has already faced, namely from the devil early on in his ministry.

If you are the Son of God, then command these stones to become bread. If you are the Son of God, then hurl yourself off and he will command his angels to retrieve you.

And here, the religious leaders imply the same. If you are who you say you are, then prove it. Give us a sign. Now, Jesus won't be a showman to their request.

His power is not wielded as entertainment. He will not subject himself to some sort of sign spectacle. He's not a show to watch.

He will not launch any fireworks. However, he does note a single sign, one sign, the sign of the prophet Jonah in verse 40.

[8 : 03] Well, the story of Jonah is well known to many of us. It's well known in our Bibles, and I don't have the time to retell it in its entirety, but it's a story of a prophet or God's messenger to a sinful nation with the message of repentance.

The facet Matthew wants us to focus upon is Jonah's miraculous deliverance from death. You see, Jonah was swallowed by a large fish.

He was helpless and hopeless and as good as dead. And it would require a supernatural act for his life to be spared. The story of Jonah is clear that after three days, God commanded the fish to vomit Jonah back onto dry land.

And here, in the same way, in Matthew's gospel, Jesus is telling religious leaders that what happened or the sign of Jonah, what happened to Jonah, will actually happen to him.

The single sign will demonstrate his identity. Like Jonah, who descended to death, and like Jonah, who was delivered to life.

[9 : 12] As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a fish, Jesus himself will be three days, three nights in the heart of the earth. It foretells Jesus' death and his impending resurrection.

See, after Jonah was delivered, he goes into a pagan city proclaiming a message of repentance, of which the whole city turns and repents. A city known for its idolatry and injustice turns and submits to the message and receives mercy.

Jonah's deliverance brought salvation for the city. Jesus' deliverance will bring salvation to the nations.

And that's the sign. And now, one who is greater than Jonah has arrived. Another one of God's messengers with a message of repentance. He is greater than Jonah, mightier in power, mightier in speech, mightier in works.

And the natural result, one would think, should be, well, the whole nation should turn. If one greater than Jonah has arrived, then the result should be greater than Jonah's.

[10 : 29] Yet that's not what we find. Instead, of repentance, we find rejection. Matthew pulls out another example. From 1 Kings chapter 10, the queen of Sheba, one filled with great doubt and skepticism, did not believe the reports of King Solomon in Israel until she came to Jerusalem and witnessed it firsthand.

As a result, she applauded Solomon for his wisdom and praised God for setting him king over his people. And the words of the Bible, gave the king 120 talents of gold and a very great quantity of spices and precious stones.

Never again such an abundance of spices as these that the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon. 120 talents of gold, I believe, is 9,000 pounds of gold.

And here you have a well-known prophet and a wise king in Israel's history attesting to the repentance and submission of outsiders to the God of Israel.

Yet now a greater prophet and a greater king have arrived in Jesus. Yet the people who are insiders have rejected his message and his wisdom.

[11 : 50] He came to his own, the Bible tells us, and his own people did not receive him. You see, that's the ploy of evil. To foster unbelief and unrepentance the repentant Ninevites and a foreign queen at the end of the day in the courtroom of heaven will stand up and condemn unrepentant Israel.

You see, the adulterous and evil generation are marked by unbelief. Evil seeks to create unbelief. Evil of all sorts.

whether it brings you to the hospital room or brings you to the point of great despair or physical pain or agony.

I remember, I recall an interview I watched with the late pastor Tim Keller and he notes evil has this way of dividing humanity.

It has this divisive effect that for some people when evil unfolds in their own life it leads to unbelief, unrepentance.

[13 : 06] No way can I trust God. Yet for others it actually draws them toward God. You see, unbelief is incredibly powerful.

If you're like me you've said God, do this miracle then I'll believe. Deliver me from this circumstance then I'll believe.

Defy the natural laws of the universe and then I'll believe. We by nature are sign seekers because we by nature long for something that we don't experience here.

God, if you're there then do this. God, if you can hear me then do this. And as our requests ascend to heaven we need to be corrected by these very words of Jesus.

We flatter ourselves to think that if God showed up he would repeatedly just perform supernatural works all along. We're naive to think our spirits would rush all of a sudden to the sun for salvation.

[14 : 11] No, the heart of unbelief is cold. Miraculous signs do not save. Only a mighty Savior saves.

And here in this passage what we need to know is in Christ we have received one sign and it is a sufficient sign.

Two thousand years later it is still sufficient. It is the single enduring sign for from it the world may be saved.

There is no expiration date on this sign. The sign of the Son of God dead, buried, resurrected, ascended.

Like Jonah Jesus would be a messenger sent by God with a message of repentance. His death and resurrection are the ultimate sign. There is no greater sign. There is no superior sign.

[15 : 14] There is no more significant sign that leads to saving faith. And so when you are overwhelmed, when you are crushed, when you are in that hospital bed, if you are in the hospital bed or you are attending to a hospital bed, know this.

What you need to pray for, you might desire healing for a loved one or deliverance for yourself. But I think what you need to pray for is God, you have given one sign that is sufficient for all people.

Clarify that sign. Let me behold a Savior on the cross for my sins, for my resurrected life. Because at the end of the day, if I'm just praying for my deliverance, my healing, it's a very selfish prayer.

It's a very isolated incident. You know why this sign, this one sign is so magnificent? It's applicable for the whole world.

It's not only my resurrected life, it's the whole resurrected world. One sign those are not in my notes and I, but it's worthwhile.

[16 : 37] You reject the sign. You reject the son. You reject his salvation. One sign is followed by seven spirits. Seven spirits.

Secondly, evil seeks to make one's heart apathetic and indifferent. Apathetic and indifferent. We have outright rejection in the first four verses.

Now, the text moves to address the heart that is indifferent because there are people who think, oh, you know what? If I don't judge Jesus, Jesus won't judge me.

I'll remain neutral on the sideline and not pick a side. I'll sit on the fence. I'll stay uninterested, uninvolved, unconcerned.

To this, Jesus goes and gives us an inside look to the spiritual realm. It would be dangerous to build a comprehensive demonology out of these verses, but it does give us a look at the power of the spiritual realm.

[17 : 42] You see, the section may feel detached from the rest, but if you remember last week, Jesus appeared on the scene because he had performed an exorcism.

In verse 22 of chapter 12, a demon oppressed man who was blind and mute was brought to him and he healed him and now Jesus is kind of returning to that episode. The people were amazed but the Pharisees accused Jesus of being demonic.

Now here, the Son of God is accompanied by the Spirit of God and demons are now being scattered about for the kingdom of God had broken in. Lives that were wrecked were now being made whole.

Here in these verses, metaphorically speaking, homes in our hearts were put in order after disarray, after the disarray of evil had been driven out by Jesus.

Things were being set aright. New lives were underway and what was once turmoil was now being reordered. The metaphor as a home is where devastation once reigned and now has given way to restoration.

[18 : 54] Think of it this way. If you commenced on a huge project in your home, I'm sure some of us have, it's a large home renovation project.

New paint, new furniture, new windows, new appliances, many new enhancements. And whether you re-inhabit it or sell it, the whole point of the renovation was what?

To prepare it for residency. You see, it would be foolish to leave it unoccupied. It would have been a waste of time, labor, resources, material.

Yet this is what many bystanders were doing. Jesus had arrived. He fed 5,000. He drove out demons.

He healed the sick. He was performing miracles miracles. And yet, people just received the benefit of Jesus.

[19 : 59] Things were slowly restored inside, put back in place. Exploitation stopped. Injustice paused. Evil eradicated temporarily. Things were good for a little bit.

Life was good for God has shown up and he was making things right. But you see, a renovated heart without an inhabitant is a waste of, in my analogy, time, resources, effort.

Why renovate your house if you're not going to live in it? And here, Jesus had renovated Israel, passively receiving the work of God, his blessing and his benefits.

And yet, the Spirit of God was not invited to dwell within them. Sure, you've tasted, some of us have tasted and seen that the Lord is good.

But we failed to receive him by faith. Your house is in order, it's swept, it's clean. but it's empty.

[21 : 13] See, evil wants you to order your home and leave it empty. Sure, Jesus may be at the front door, but certainly do not invite him in.

He might mess it up. He might make further renovations. See, evil thinks Jesus is best on the outside, which you'll find in verse 46.

don't answer and he'll leave you alone. Be apathetic, be indifferent. Do you see the horror of indifference? Jesus tells us the spirit, the original spirit that was driven out, that had made the mess, leaves, wanders around the world and figures out, oh, the place that I originally lived in renovated.

And that spirit goes and finds seven of their friends, I'm not sure if spirits are gendered his or her friends, and they move in. The number seven usually represents fullness, and here you have it, the fullness of evil is now inhabiting in that place.

The last state, according to Jesus, of that person is worse than the first. And Matthew is writing to the collective nation, foretelling of her demise. the king had arrived and the people failed to receive him.

[22 : 35] And I can't help but transpose it to our generation. To take the language of the writer to the Hebrews, those who had once been enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, shared even in the Holy Spirit, tasted in the goodness of the word of God and the powers and the age to come, all of a sudden when their house is in order, when life is going great, they failed to invite the one in who had did it all.

Houses unoccupied, renovated homes without renovated hearts, left vacant bizarrely. And this is why the call to faith in the Bible is always urgent.

The day of salvation is always today. the call to act is always immediate. The example of the twelve reflects this.

It's always very bizarre when you're like, oh, Simon Peter related to Jesus just like, he said, hey, come follow me, and then that was it. No conversation.

But what it reflects is that the disciples immediately followed. Sure, they didn't have it all figured out beforehand, but they had resolved to follow Jesus.

[24 : 00] There was no gray area where they could sit idly. For whoever, verse 30 says, whoever is not with me is against me. There is no gray area. Even the indifferent in the kingdom are seen as enemies.

And therefore, today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts when you have tasted the goodness of the Son of God. By faith, take hold of him. Be united to him, and his spirit will take up residency inside, lest you be occupied by another spirit, and your final state will be far worse than your current.

One sign, seven spirits, many siblings, many siblings. Thirdly, I want us to see that evil seeks to undo the family of God.

Evil seeks to undo the family of God. The chapter closes with a contrast. The first two sections, signs and spirits, one sign, seven spirits, were marked by being noted as an evil and adulterous generation.

I've noted that. And they were condemned for their failure to follow Jesus. You see, the natural question then emerges, well, I don't want to succumb to evil in unbelief or unrepentance.

[25 : 27] I don't want to succumb to evil in indifference or apathy. Then what is the indicator of a faithful generation? One that's accepted by God.

How do I know I haven't overlooked Jesus, but I've responded in faith? Well, Matthew takes us indoors in verse 46 to a teaching lesson. Jesus is speaking and his mother and brothers are outside looking for him.

When told this in a single statement, Jesus upends the entire biological family. Now, he doesn't denounce his mother or his brothers, for they certainly remain his mom and his brothers in human terms.

But he redefines family in heaven's terms. It reads, in stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, here are my mother and my brothers.

Whoever does the will of my father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother. Jesus, in a single sentence, speaks of the most significant earthly relationship and clarifies who his siblings are.

[26 : 42] father. They are those who do the will of his father. In a single sentence, he displaces his earthly mom and his brothers.

He doesn't disown them. He redefines them. Mary, though a mom by human birth, we know that, is only truly his mom as she gives herself to the will of God.

Jesus as his human brothers understood this. They lived out this reality. You may know that Jesus had a couple brothers contribute to the New Testament.

Their names are James and Jude. And as they wrote their letters to the early church, neither of them noted that reality. As if to say, the most significant thing about my relationship to Jesus is not that I am a blood biological brother.

The most significant thing, according to James, is James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jude does the same.

[27 : 56] The most significant thing about me is not that I'm the half-brother of Jesus, but I, Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ, the brother of James. You see, they lived out this reality.

They understood that the most significant relationship they had in that life was not to Jesus the human, but to Jesus the Christ.

Their identity, credibility, and authority are rooted not in human birth and blood, but through divine rebirth. earth. In these verses, we are given this truth.

I read this from a commentary, and it's striking. Human kinship does not take priority over spiritual kinship.

Whoa! Human kinship does not take priority over spiritual kinship. And therefore, in this room, we are among many siblings.

[28 : 59] We are part of a heavenly family that's innumerable. We comprise a faith family that will outlive our earthly families. We make up an eternal family that carries more significance in Jesus' eyes than our earthly family.

To some, you're like, yes! That's the greatest news ever! To others, we are challenged and must reorient our priorities.

See, it's a staggering assertion. But genuine faith, how do I know that evil is not taking root in my heart and unbelief and apathy and indifference?

when genuine faith is made evident, genuine faith in our hearts are made evident in how we work out the will of God in this family.

Your genuine faith is actually seen in how you give yourself to your neighbor across the aisle, to the well-being of this family. And in so doing, we identify ourselves as Jesus' true relatives.

[30 : 16] relatives. What do I mean by giving ourselves to the well-being of this family? Well, you know. You've grown up in a home of sorts, whether it's all together or in shambles.

But family members are committed to its well-being, its cleanliness, its hospitality, and its order. Families spend time together, encourage one another, speak truth to one another, support one another.

We are those who bring our resources together for the flourishing of the family. When I ask, I'm sure it's for all of us, Dad, why do I got to do that?

Why do I got to take out the trash or do that chore? Because you're part of this family. Well, I don't want to mow the lawn.

We should just hire someone to mow the lawn, pay somebody to mow the lawn. In the city, we don't have lawns, which is great. Well, pay someone to shovel the snow. No, you're going to do it. Why? Why do I have to do it?

[31 : 12] Because you're part of this family. The same applies to this space and this place.

We share in chores and we share in responsibilities. I don't expect any stranger to come into my home to do my chores. Why?

Because they're not part of the family. But if you are my son, God is saying, or daughter, the responsibilities of this home are all rightfully yours.

You see, you and I should be naturally inclined by the Spirit of God to think about the well-being of this place and this people.

It is good and right for once a day or once a week to pause and to think, how do I live out the will of God in this place, in its flourishing, in its peace?

[32 : 17] See, the will of God will be further developed in coming weeks. To know the will of God you'll find next week is to hear the word of God. You'll see it repeatedly in the upcoming chapters.

No child can do the will of their parents unless they hear the word of their parents. That's right. And this will apply to our faith family as well.

We cannot do the will of God unless we hear the word of God. The kingdom of God in this last section of many siblings would not grow like earthly kingdoms.

Earthly kings form harems. They procreate. they establish empires through their progenitive powers.

Princes rule these regions. Sons rule these regions. Not so with Jesus. He's assembling a kingdom that supersedes all earthly kingdoms.

[33 : 20] And as one writer put it this way, as a faithful son of Israel he is expected to marry and have child. Yet Jesus remains single. His singleness moreover is a sign that God's kingdom will not grow by biological ascription.

Rather the kingdom of God grows by witness and conversion. You see for Jesus his kingdom would be comprised of many siblings innumerable of which this church identifies. evil seeks to undo this. To undo this faith family. Her unity, her worship, her worth, and her witness.

So beware. The agenda, the ambition of evil is one to create in your heart and my heart unbelief and unrepentance.

this. Secondly, the agenda ambition of evil is to make you apathetic, indifferent. I'm just going to wait this out. I don't need to decide today.

[34 : 34] I have a whole life to figure this out. And when I get to my deathbed maybe I'll make a decision then. No, no. That's what evil seeks to do. And lastly, evil wants to undo this.

Un unravel this. And as I conclude, we need to know, as Matthew has noted, Jesus is not a unanimous candidate, surprisingly.

Not all are in favor of his kingship. The evil one works out evil to foster unbelief, hardness of heart, apathy, indifference, creating these outposts for himself to destroy this family.

And these serve as warnings to us, but we're reminded that in it all, God continues to draw to himself people.

The invitation has been extended to come to him. We are to leave the dark side and the cookies and to find ourselves as those delivered from the domain of darkness, transferred into the kingdom of his beloved son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

[35 : 56] May God turn skeptics to sons, doubters to daughters, mockers to mothers.

father, we thank you for your word. And as evil rages, we know its intentions, but greater is he who is in us, in this church, than he who is in the world.

And so father, would you continue to restrain evil and its effects. And in it all, may the son of the Lord, may the son of God be lifted high and draw men and women, children, to himself.

We ask these things for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. This morning.