Are you with Jesus or against him?

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[0:00] I don't know, like you, but on the one hand, I'm left wanting to get into Romans 7 and 8. I'm itching to get into it. Help us understand who we are now in Christ a bit more.

But just because we're doing the sermon series in Matthew now doesn't mean you can't go ahead and read chapter 7 and 8 and study it. So go for it. And who knows, maybe returning the repetition will get Romans into our heads better once we get back to it.
Then again, it wouldn't be the first time that God's plans, once we're looking back, are better than our plans. And on the other hand, having just looked at last week at being enslaved to sin under the power of sin and being rescued by Christ, maybe that actually gives us great momentum into our passage today and helps us see our neediness as we come to this passage about a demon-oppressed man.
Because demon oppression, very few people claim to have experienced it, very few claim to have seen it.
So I think last week that we're under the power of sin might help us to not treat this as academic, but that once we get to the end of this passage, we should be seeing, I need rescue from the evil within me.
[1:26] I think we should be arriving at that point. I need rescue from the evil within me. Now, I don't know, depending on your background, that phrase, you might find that a bit over the top.

Am I exaggerating? The evil within me. Am I just... I'm not trying to exaggerate. Maybe you've come from a past where you've been in the occult, a new age spiritism, or maybe you've come from a culture that works with the spirits, which is really important to have a blessed rather than a cursed life.
Or maybe you grew up in a culture like I did where a secular, materialistic, what you see is what is. And this idea of spirits is just a little bit hard to accept.
I think the real Jesus in this passage is going to challenge each of us, depending on our background, differently. But what all these backgrounds... They have something in common.
They don't appreciate what the biggest weapon of Satan is. It's not demon oppression.
[2:40] That's not his greatest power. I'm just reflecting on my past week. The first few days, I got knocked out by a virus.

I forgot that there were other viruses around, but I was reminded of that last week. A fairly minor thing compared to other illness. But that wasn't the thing that wreaked the most havoc in my week last week.
It wasn't being sick. The thing that wreaked the most havoc was the lies that I was believing.
There's dead silence.
You're wondering what lies... You can't wait for me to just tell you. I'll tell you later, I'll recover. But some of the lies I could see...
I'm guessing there's other lies that I'm happily believing and I'm blind to. We looked at this last week. Sin enslaves us in a lie.
[3:45] Think of back Adam and Eve in the garden. Is God really offering you the best life? He's holding out on you. If you want to take control, then be your own God.

You don't need him. Take it for yourself. These kind of thoughts, and they get much more specific than that, these lies wreak havoc in our lives, in our relationships, in our world.
We may not be oppressed by demons, but we are constantly oppressed by lies. Constantly. If you are in Christ, let me say at this point, Satan has no power over you.
I don't want you to get the wrong idea this morning. If you are in Christ, Satan has no power over you. He only has the power we give to him when we believe his lies.

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I'm going to give an example so that you know what I'm talking about. But I've given it before. I'm not sure if it's a very good one. I couldn't come up with a better one.
[4:49] So picture someone who believes that they absolutely need to be successful at their job for their own self-image. They have to have that for their own self-image to feel valuable.

Now, what will believing that lie do to their character in their life? Being devoted to their job, it might come at the cost of their own physical health.
They're pushing themselves too far. It probably will come at the cost of care for family and other loved ones. It will come at the cost of engagement with church and what we're called to serve here. It will come at the cost of awareness of other people's suffering. You're just too busy. You're focused on your job. You don't have the resources, the time to give to other people's suffering. You need to just advance in your career. And if anything frustrates that goal, look out. Like the character of the person.
[5:54] It won't be patience if someone frustrates you. It will be anger. I think it will even distort how you measure a successful life. I'm not sure if that illustration is doing anything for you, but believing that lie distorts the character we're meant to have as God's image bearers and it wreaks havoc on priorities and relationships just by believing the lie that you need to be successful in your job to be valuable.

At this point, it's worth considering what do you believe you absolutely need. If it's not what God says you need, it's enslaving you.
It's distorting priorities. It's distorting character. So Satan enslaves and destroys God's image bearers by feeding us lies constantly.
The good news of this passage is that Jesus is in the business of restoring, setting free and slave people like we heard last week as well. So if you've got your Bibles open, chapter 12, as we dive back into the story of Jesus, as we re-enter the life of Jesus, we need to realise we're entering a battle zone.
Things are heating up. Things are escalating. Confrontation isn't just brewing. It is outright going for it. Knives are out. We're told in chapter 12, verse 14, let me flick back, that the Pharisees have decided they went out and conspired against Jesus how to destroy him.
[7:39] They have come to a firm conclusion about Jesus. Then we're given a passage from Isaiah. We're given Matthew's perspective of Jesus, or more specifically, God the Father's perspective.

God the Father's perspective is, my soul delights in my son. He's going to fix the world. So you've got these two conclusions.
And Matthew is saying, which one are you aligning with? Do you see him as someone who needs to get out of your life? Or do you see him as someone who's going to fix your life and your soul delighting in him?
When it comes to Jesus, there's no neutrality. It's impossible to sit on the fence. He claims an enormous control over your life, his claims.
And he offers a rescue that either you want it or you don't want it because you're not that needy. I want to just pause for a moment and consider why are the Pharisees so offended by Jesus?
[8:49] Let's not straw man the Pharisees' point of view. But why are they so sure that Jesus has to die? These are the experts. We rely on experts all the time in life.

The experts of the day were sure that Jesus has to die. He's got to go. How did they come to that conclusion? Well, they're sus on Jesus from the start because Jesus comes from Galilee.
He's not from the religiously pure area of Jerusalem. So the fact he's from Galilee and Nazareth, already they're sus on him. And then they see him associating with sinful people.
Like someone honourable wouldn't be touching or going close to sinful people. He's defiling himself.
But most clearly of all, Jesus is breaking God's law when it came to the Sabbath.
That's where it came to a head. He allowed his disciples to pluck heads of grain as they walked.
And he healed a man with a deformed hand in the synagogue on the Sabbath.
[10:01] He didn't wait to the next day. He can't be the Messiah if he's disobeying God's Sabbath law. They understand that Jesus is introducing a totally different idea of what the kingdom of God is and what criteria there is for belonging to that kingdom.

They don't see Jesus as just tweaking things here and there. They see what he's doing. He's offering a totally different kingdom to what they think it is.

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Totally different criteria. Pharisees, they think they have peace with God because they're careful to keep God's law. Jesus is saying, you have peace with God if you belong to me.
Very different. Pharisees are saying, get yourself in order, make some effort people, and then you can come into God's presence and he'll give you blessing.
Jesus is saying, come as you are in your sin and in your mess, come as you are into God's presence, receive his blessings and then you will change. They know he's offering a totally different kingdom.
[11:15] And they do not like it because it means they're out. It's hard to pinpoint exactly why the Pharisees found this so threatening.

They're losing power and status in the community. They're losing control over their own lives if they had to submit to this. I suspect another huge hurdle, maybe the biggest hurdle, I can't really prove this, is that to accept Jesus and his kingdom where he's offering forgiveness and salvation is to admit that I'm a desperate person.
I don't have it all together. I am inclined to do evil and not good and I need rescue. I don't think they wanted to accept that image of themselves.
So, getting into our passage for today. The occasion is a demon-oppressed man, blind.
There's some things I fear to happen to me. Blindness is up there. I've been blind and mute. He would have been isolated from engaging with people in community, isolated from the temple, that he couldn't go into the temple, he couldn't feel at peace with God, he would feel cursed by God.
[12:42] But when he encounters Jesus, completely restored. The crowds are amazed. This is the first time, this is the only time Matthew uses this word amazed.

They are astonished all these other times, but this time they are just floored. But they're then hesitant.
The crowds are floored by what they see. Incredible restoration. But they're hesitant. Is this the son of David? He doesn't quite fit their expectations.
So that's the occasion. If you've been following the federal election campaign, I've been watching Q&A; a little bit, and the hosts just have to say again and again, OK, stop talking about the other, talking to liberal and labor politicians, stop talking about criticising them, just what's your policies, what's your policies?
Stop criticising. And every now and then, you hear a criticism of the opposition, where you're just like, you did not come up with that on the spot. That is a polished one-liner that you thought of behind closed doors, very calmly, strategically, and then you just hear it again and again.
[14:03] Here is a very thought-through one-liner. We've heard this one before in chapter 9, verse 34. The Pharisees know the crowds are watching, and they've come up with a banger.

Like, this is good, if you want to bring Jesus down. When the Pharisees heard what had happened, they saw what had happened, it is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons.
I'm actually impressed. Like, that's pretty good. If you're going to slander someone, slander Jesus. This is strategy. This is war. We've got to take him out.
One of the impressive things about the historical Jesus is he's so calm under threat. He just dismantles this slander easily and then turns it into a teaching moment.
It's one of the impressive things about the real Jesus. I don't think he's just defending the slander for his own image sake.
[15:10] I actually think he's doing it for the crowd's sake so that they can believe in him. I think he's even doing it for the slanderers themselves that they might repent. So Jesus doesn't come up with an even better piece of slander that knocks them out of the water.

He's not like that. But his words here in this passage, they're very confronting. They're very piercing. If you're not challenged by the end of this passage, there's a good chance I haven't done my job properly, but it is challenging.
It is piercing. It's not slanderous, but it is challenging and piercing. So let's get into it.
So scholars aren't 100% sure about where Beelzebul, that name comes from. From what I read, the best option is that it's a translation that literally means Lord of the house, which kind of fits with this whole kingdom house metaphor.
So they're calling him the Lord of the house, the house of evil, that is. And then he easily dismantles their accusation. Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste.

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[16:30] No city or house divided against itself will stand. Let me just use the illustration from the federal campaign again, election campaign. There is one strategy that no one is expecting.

No one is expecting the political parties to replace their candidates a few weeks out from the election.
Like to remove them would just be, at this point, would be conceding, okay, give the vote. Give the vote to the opposition. No one is expecting that strategy.
It would be a very stupid strategy. And yet that's their claim about what Jesus is doing. Okay, Satan is removing his agents from the field.
It's just a stupid strategy. Or in sport, the phrase is often, a team is only as strong as its weakest player because the opposition will attack the weakest link.
[17:31] But imagine, as we saw in the kids' talk, if a player took out one of their own players. It doesn't matter what the rest of the players did. That action would just get loose.

It's a stupid strategy. Or in war, who targets their own resources? It's just silly thinking.
And then in verse 27, he highlights how hypocritical their claim is. So do your people who cast out demons also do it by the power of Satan? No, you celebrate when your people cast out demons. You say, wow, the power of God at work. And now you're saying it's the power of Satan. It's so hypocritical. So there are some records of others casting out demons, but it's often, it's much less frequent than Jesus does it and much more like there was ritual and there was prayers involved. Whereas Jesus is just, get out. There's a different authority and they know that. They're actually acknowledging that. It's by the prince of demons. We can't deny your power, Jesus, but we will slander where it comes from.
[18:44] So after easily dismantling their accusation, he turns it into a teaching moment.

If it is by the spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. If the spirit is working through Jesus, God's kingdom, and by implication, God's king is here.
To enter Satan's house and plunder his goods, someone stronger must be here, as we saw in the kids' talk. You are seeing Satan's goods plundered.
There is no wrestle going on between good and evil. Good is overthrowing evil easily. So come to the obvious conclusion. The stronger man is here.
And so there's no neutrality when it comes to Jesus. Whoever is not with me is against me.
[19:48] He's overthrowing evil. Whoever is not with me is against me. Imagine I took that attitude into an elders meeting. I have this idea, and whoever is not with me is against me.

That's a pretty arrogant thing to say. It's very polemical. Which side are you on?
Jesus is saying it because of who he is and what he is busy doing. I think as Christians we can apply this attitude to the wrong place. We can apply it to areas of wisdom, like politics.
You can read the bulletin article for that. Jesus isn't saying do that. There's another phrase he uses in Mark's Gospel that complements this one. Whoever is not against us is for us.
Don't be quick. If Christians are doing something differently, don't be too quick in saying they're the opposition. Don't be too quick in doing that. We're told to persuade and gently restore, to win your brother over.
[21:06] But Jesus here is saying a very polemical statement. You're with me or you're against me. It can't be neutral ground. Why?

Why? Why? Why? Because I've come to undo evil and its effects in your life, in the world. I'm in the business of gathering people to God.
If you don't want that for yourself, then you want to be scattered from God. You want the status quo of evil in your life.
To not be with Jesus in his mission to gather to God and to get evil out of our lives is to accept evil in our lives and not want it.
This is a matter of ultimate importance. This is a matter of ultimate importance. So he's assuming here that there is evil that we need rescue from.
[22:07] And I think that's partly why we talk about forgiveness here. And here we come to one of those really hard sayings that's hard to understand at first, I think.

Therefore, I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

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So this is the one who healed the paralytic. He clearly has authority to forgive sins. And he's saying if you can be forgiven or not.
The first thing to point out is that when he says either in this age or the age to come, that's really just saying forever. Never. If you're forgiven now, you're forgiven forever.
If you're not forgiven now, you're not forgiven forever. Never. I don't think we should be fearing that you could be forgiven in one era and not the next. It's just a way of saying never.
[23:13] Now, I think the fear in us jumps to what we can't be forgiven from. Are you focusing on that bit? Let's slow down and look at what we can be forgiven from.

Every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people. Now, I know we talk about forgiveness a lot. Forgiveness is not cheap.
When we look at what it costs Jesus. Every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people. That's incredible. I think some people, we say, like, they said this about me.
It's just too harsh a word. Jesus didn't like that. I don't know how you came to faith. But whatever you thought or said about Jesus, it's forgiven.
You might have some big sin in the past and you know that God's forgiveness washes you clean of everything. But that big one, I'm not sure if God can forgive me for that.
[24:22] The king's verdict here is if you're with me, it can be forgiven. It is forgiven. Every sin and blasphemy is forgiven. It's why it's so out of place for Christians.

It's so anti-gospel to say that someone has done something too awful for me to forgive them. Consequences, absolutely. There should be consequences for things. But forgiveness, it's out of place because God doesn't treat us like that.
If Jesus has gone to the cross, every sin and blasphemy is forgiven. I can't think of a worse sin than nailing Jesus to the cross while mocking him.
And yet he's praying for their forgiveness. If you're with me, every sin, every slander is forgiven. So what is this one unforgivable sin then?
What is this blasphemy of the Holy Spirit? It seems to say that it's possible to do something that puts yourself even beyond God's desire to forgive you.
[25:36] It can't be saying that the Spirit is somehow separate from Jesus. It's not saying that Jesus is less important than the Spirit.

If we see what's going on in the context, the Pharisees are looking at Jesus and saying, your spirit-empowered ministry is evil.
This is a very deliberate, thought-through opposition to Jesus.
It is not an accidental thing. It's not just a curse that's gone through your mind that you thought an evil thing about Jesus or the Spirit.
It's not a thought. This is a determined, strategic opposition to the Jesus of the gospel. As Don Carson put it, it's a conscious, conscious, you're deciding to do this, disputing of the indisputable, that Jesus is empowered by the Spirit to bring about salvation.
[26:49] Let me try and say it a different way. You know, if you won't come, if you just are determined not to come to the clear and obvious conclusion from the gospel records in Matthew, that Jesus is empowered by God to bring salvation, if you won't come to the clear and obvious conclusion, you're cutting yourself off from the one person who can forgive you.

All forgiveness is found here. But if you won't come to it, you can't be forgiven for anything. If you're worried that you might have said something or thought something that means you blaspheme the Spirit, your worry, I would say, is a very clear sign of the Spirit's working in you.
The Spirit points out where we have failed God. And the Spirit points us to Jesus going, if I'm ever going to be forgiven, he's my only hope. If that, even a glimpse of that is working in your soul, that means the Spirit is at work in you.
You have not done this, no matter what awful thought you've had. But if you're like the Pharisees and you don't see yourself as needing rescue, you're cutting yourself off from forgiveness.
There is no forgiveness. I'll put it one other way, borrowing from Tim Keller here.
[28:25] Think of it in terms of external and internal. So externally, our words, our behaviours, and I'll add in our thought life, all the external, there is no sin that can't be forgiven.

All is forgivable. But internally, in terms of the Spirit working in us to be convicted of our sin and to look to Jesus for forgiveness, if we resist that internal prompting of the Spirit for all of our life, not just in a single moment, but for all of our life, then we're cutting ourselves off from forgiveness.

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The only way for you to put yourself beyond God's eagerness to forgive you is if you are determined not to want Jesus to rescue you.
Determined. Not just a one-off, but determined the rest of your life. But if you do see a glimpse of the Spirit-empowered ministry of Jesus, then if you do want him, all is forgiven.
Every sin and blasphemy. So how do you know if you're with Jesus or against him? Or another way of the question is, how deep is our problem that we need rescuing from?
[29:54] Jesus tells us plainly, you can tell by your words, which Bo helpfully introduced for us this morning. You can tell by your words. You don't have to, you're not left guessing.

Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers, talking to the Pharisees, how can you speak good when you are evil?
But 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 account for every careless, what we might think insignificant, every careless word they speak.
For by your words, you will be justified. Here the positive as well as the negative here. By your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned. So the Pharisees, conscious, determined opposition, it's by the prince of demons he casts out demons.
[31:03] The crowds, they're gobsmacked by Jesus, but they're still hesitant to come to him. It isn't Jesus being assessed here. By their words, God is assessing them.

Why by words? Because they're the overflow of what's in us. The heart is, the Bible talks of the heart as the control centre of our person.
What's controlling you will come out of your words. James talks about you can't tame the tongue. Like it just spews out. That's a negative image. Or it bubbles out.
It overflows. It's so full it overflows. Either for good or for evil. If you weren't sure how deep the problem of evil is in your person, then our words show us.
Like if you want to maintain a perception of yourself as a good person, if you want to keep up that pretense, you've got to totally discount your words.
[32:15] You can't factor your words in. Maybe your behaviour, you can set up an image of yourself, but I don't know. If you're anything like me, you've got to just rule out all your words from the equation.

The angry snap at your loved ones. The not-so-veiled boasting. The complaining.
The whinging. The lack of thankfulness to God. The slander and criticism that we either unintentionally or intentionally want to bring someone down.
The fault-finding words. It's the twisting of truth to paint ourselves in a better light. Or it's known by another name, lying. You just take a quick look.
I told you that my sickness wasn't the thing wreaking havoc. The lies in my week that produced the words in my week. Oof. But the remedy isn't just polite speech.
[33:25] Jesus here says, make the tree good. Make the tree bad. There needs to be profound change in the core of who we are for our words to change.

The Pharisees determine opposition. The crowd's hesitancy to come to Jesus should have been a warning that evil is ruling in their control centre.
They need rescue. My words about Jesus, yes, but this is a broader principle. My words to God's image bearers. They reveal how much evil is stored up in me.
I need rescue from evil within me. So what does being with Jesus look like? What words come out of a person who is with Jesus, who knows his forgiveness?
The New Testament has a lot to say about words. I just want to draw our attention to two things. One passage is 1 John 1, 8 to 10. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.
[34:45] But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar and his word is not in us. I think the mark of a Christian's words firstly should be confessing.
Yeah, yeah, I sin. I sin way more than I want to. They're the kind of words that overflow out of a Christian. The other mark of being with the stronger man is we look to a great saviour.

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Or as Peter later says in chapter 16, you are the Christ. You are the son of the living God. We confess him. And Jesus immediately responds to Peter, Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.
If you can confess Jesus as Lord, if you can see his ministry is empowered by the Spirit to bring salvation and forgiveness, if you can see him for who he is, God has gathered you to himself. [36:13] He's revealed that to you. You didn't come to it by your own reasoning. So the words of a Christian are filled with confession, are filled with Christ is my stronger man who can defeat my evil.

There's no neutrality with Jesus. Either you're with Jesus or against him. Either you can cling to your self-image that wins the praise of people because they can see the external in your life.
You can try and convince yourself you're a relatively good person. You're running your life pretty well. You don't need this spirit-empowered rescue. Or you can take your words seriously and examine the root where it comes from.
And confessing your sin. Confessing your need for a stronger man. Asking him to forgive from all sin and every slander. You'll praise him.
They're the two options. There's no middle ground. There's no middle ground. There's no house.

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