

# Matthew 12:22-32

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[0:00] I invite you to turn with me to Matthew chapter 12. As you're turning there, if you don't have a Bible with you, or if you don't own a Bible, there are some on the back table that are already bookmarked to today's passage.

I did it myself. And if you don't own a Bible, that's our gift to you for sure. We are walking with Jesus through the book of Matthew.

In Matthew chapter 12, beginning in verse 22, we hear this about Christ our King. Then a demon-oppressed man, who was blind and mute, was brought to him, and he healed him, so that the man spoke and saw.

And all the people were amazed and said, Can this be the son of David? But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons. 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 if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself.

[1:26] 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. But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

Or 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. And whoever does not gather with me scatters. 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 a 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 in the age to come. This is God's holy, inerrant, and inspired word.

Let's pray. Our Father in Heaven, will you, by the power of your Holy Spirit, open our eyes and ears, our hearts and minds, to see and glory in your Son.

[2:44] We pray that in his matchless name. Amen. Our passage today begins in verse 22. Then a demon-oppressed man, who was blind and mute, was brought to him, and he healed him.

So the man spoke and saw. All the people were amazed. And said, Can this be the Son of David? But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons.

Do not worry if you are feeling a sense of déjà vu. If you were with us this fall as we walked through Matthew chapter 9, you might remember a similar episode.

Matthew chapter 9, verse 32, As they were going away, Behold, a demon-oppressed man, who was mute, was brought to him. And when the demon had been cast out, the mute man spoke, and the crowds marveled, saying, Never was anything like this seen in Israel.

But the Pharisees said, He casts out demons by the prince of demons. Now, if you've ever engaged in or watched an ongoing debate, you know, Republicans versus Democrats, Ford versus Chevy, cat people versus sane people, you've probably heard the same arguments more than once.

[4:06] You've probably heard them again and again. And if you've been at it long enough, you have probably been able to anticipate just how the argument's going to go, each and every time.

And that's what we see here. The Pharisees are returning to an argument they've already made against Jesus. Now, the difference between this passage and Matthew chapter 9 is that Jesus responds.

In fact, that's most of the passage is his response. And so we are going to pay careful attention to Christ's reply today. But before we do that, let's review just a bit what we observed back in chapter 9, the first time the Pharisees aimed this argument at Jesus.

The first thing is to know that we do have a spiritual enemy. There is a demon in this passage. Jesus does refer to Satan. Jesus does cast out the demon.

This is not superstition, but reality. C.S. Lewis once wrote, there are two equal and opposite errors into which we can fall about the devils.

[5:19] One is to disbelieve their existence. The other is to believe and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight.

The second thing to note is that the Bible is not pre-scientific superstition. This is not anti-science. We look here and say, oh, you know, a demon made him blind and mute.

Well, of course, that's because they didn't know and really, you know, a demon for every sickness and a god for every other. But actually, if we look at the broad scope of the biblical data, we don't see the Bible attributing sickness and torment and disease mostly to demons.

Earlier in this chapter, Jesus healed someone with no demonic activity present. And that's the majority of his healings. And further, the Bible doesn't describe how demons afflict people, right? It could be by a direct attack, but we're not told that. It could be that they run down someone's immune system, making them susceptible to illness.

[6:40] We aren't given that kind of detail and we should resist the urge to supply detail that the Scriptures withhold. Third, demonic activity looks very little like Hollywood.

In Scripture, the physical activity of demons is typically related to sickness, not levitation and ghouls, which makes sense because if it looked like darkness, we would run to the light and that's exactly what Satan doesn't want.

Instead, the two main tools that our enemy uses are on display in this passage. The first is right there in the open, torment. The man is made blind and mute.

The other tool and the primary tool and the one that Jesus takes aim at today is Satan's chief tool. It is more subtle and that is by design.

The primary tool our enemy uses is lies. He doesn't present himself as spooky. The Bible says he masquerades as an angel of light to lead us astray.

[7:49] Subtle lies like the one he told to Eve, did God really say? Lies like the one he said to Christ in chapter 4, if you're really the son of God, dot, dot, dot.

Lies like the one he, I think, tells most Americans, including most American Christians, doesn't God just want you to be happy? So there are two demonic problems in this passage.

A man's torment, he's made blind and mute, and more seriously, the enemy's lies about Christ.

Torment and lies are his primary tools, which is why when the Bible talks about spiritual warfare, and especially our spiritual warfare, it's not incantations and rituals and relics.

When the Bible speaks of spiritual warfare, it sounds like this, 2 Corinthians 10. The weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but have divine power to destroy strongholds.

We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God and take every thought captive to obey Christ.

[9:04] Spiritual warfare primarily has to do not with incantations and talismans like in Hollywood, but in proclaiming the truth about Christ to the watching world and to ourselves.

We can't take anyone else's thoughts captive. We can't have anyone else obey Christ. That's about ourselves. So evangelism is spiritual warfare, and apologetics is spiritual warfare, and so is missions, and so is discipleship, the process of taking our thoughts captive to obey Christ.

Christ. The enemy is a liar, and that's the biggest demonic problem in this passage. The lies about Christ, and our spiritual warfare consists in destroying his lies with the truth of Christ.

Fourth quick observation. So the devil did not make you do it. That's not actually really in this passage, but it is super related. There is a particular system of Christian teaching, and it's not uncommon in the United States, that says something like, are you angry?

Well, you must have a demon of anger. Are you greedy? It must be a demon of greed, and you need it cast out. Now this isn't something that I've ever heard here at Shoreline, but it's a big internet out there.

[10:25] So the Bible is clear. The devil did not make you do it. The Bible says, if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

The Bible says, put to death, therefore, what is earthly in you, sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness. The Bible says, sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these are works of our flesh, not a demon.

Our anger, lust, envy, indulgence come from our own sin. I am the author of my own sin. The enemy may tempt me, but I only sin because that temptation looks good to me.

It is what my heart desires, and I stand justly condemned for my sins, and so do you, and so does the whole world. And the Pharisees stand condemned for their lie.

And Jesus begins to dismantle it in 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.

[11:57] And if Satan casts out Satan, he is 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.

Jesus responds to the Pharisees' lie with three refutations. The first two we've just read and the third we will find in a moment. The first is in verses 25 and 26, the divided kingdom.

One of the most incredible sights in all of professional sports happens off the field and is not athletic in any nature. Now, as a fan of the New England Patriots, I must admit that watching the New York Jets implode every year is, by their mismanagement and their terrible coaching and their huge egos and other off-field drama is just beautiful to me.

I love it. It's a house divided. And on the internet, Jets-ing has become a verb that means shooting yourself in the foot through internal strife like the New York Jets.

Now, for a fan, there is just something beautiful about watching a division rival Jets-ing year in and year out. It's a kingdom perpetually divided against itself and it is something to behold.

[13:25] Now, pass me the popcorn. It's just riveting. And if you're a Jets fan here today, I'm not sorry. Now, neither the Jets nor the Patriots matter.

They're an entertainment product and I might add that they're entertaining for very different reasons. There is a lighthearted sense in which we can enjoy a kingdom divided but we all also know how destructive a house divided can be and it's not entertaining.

There are a number of military members here today. How many of you have been in a command climate where the house was divided?

Perhaps it was the CO versus the XO or the officers versus the enlisted or one division versus another. How effective was that unit? How many alcohol incidents were there?

Maybe you've worked in another workplace that was a house divided. did that organization thrive? Most of our cadets are, actually all of our cadets it seems are on spring break.

[14:37] When they return ask them about living in Chase Hall. Some years depending on the command climate it feels like a house divided between C Division and the Corps of Cadets.

And I am sure you've seen maybe in close proximity a marriage divided. And that's not entertainment. Not like the Jets, right?

It is life sapping. It can be emotionally and even physically destructive. It is not a laughing matter. And as an aside, if your family or a family you know is a kingdom divided, our instinct is to keep quiet.

It's impolite to bring it up or uncomfortable or perhaps shameful. But if you or a loved one is living through great family division, please bring that to the light.

Ask for help. the resources of Christ's church, your church family stands ready to stand with you. A house divided is inherently unstable.

[15:53] It's unproductive. It's a tragedy. And that's exactly Jesus' point here. The Pharisees' lie doesn't even make sense. If Satan were casting out Satan, he wouldn't even have the power to keep going on.

The second refutation of their lie comes with his argument, your sons, he says. We have historical reports that the Jewish people did on occasion perform exorcism rituals.

From the records that we do have, they were nothing like Christ's exorcisms. When they attempted an exorcism, they brought tools, incense and jewelry and talismans. Jesus brought himself. their attempts involved elaborate incantations. Jesus simply commanded the demons to leave. So Jesus isn't saying that they were doing the exact same thing here, but what he is saying, and I think his point is this, he's saying to the Pharisees, your followers also address the demonic. What little power they have, do you believe they're using it for evil? Of course not. Exorcists do their ministry to help people. If I'm here also helping people, demons aren't in the business of helping people.

[17:15] And so he says they will be your judges. Whatever judgment you give to the Jewish exorcists, you have to apply to Christ because their aim is the same. And his third rebuttal comes in verses 28 and 29.

He says, but if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or 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. The argument goes something like this. Satan is the strong man. And Jesus is taking his stuff.

He's reclaiming people. Christ came to save sinners. And taking Satan's stuff is the furthest thing from being in league with Satan. And it also means that Satan has bound the strong man.

Our enemy is not sovereign. Our king is. And so Jesus has dismantled their argument. First he said a kingdom is divided, right?

[18:25] The accusation doesn't even make sense. Secondly he talks about the sons and their motivation. They would have to call their own exorcists evil for this to stand. And then finally the binding of the strong man.

Jesus isn't helping Satan. He's taking his stuff. Now you and I when we defeat somebody's argument we feel pretty good about ourselves and that's that. But Jesus isn't really so concerned about that he wants to move past it.

He's not content to leave it here. He doesn't end when he's defeated their argument. Now he begins his own argument. What he says is that it is not enough to reject the Pharisees.

We must embrace Jesus. Verse 30 whoever is not with me is against me. And whoever does not gather with me scatters.

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 a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven.

[19:27] But whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. Either in this age or the age to come. No. There are three ideas in this section.

And if we don't address the third one first. This idea of an unforgivable sin. I'm not sure we'll be able to concentrate on the other two. So let's get that one out of the way.

This idea that we see in verses 31 and 32 of a sin that will not be forgiven. Well the church has been discussing this for 2,000 years.

And it has been discussed at length. Some people think that this sin could only be committed during Christ's earthly ministry. And others believe that it is possible to still commit it today.

Regardless of your position on that and your understanding of what he's talking about here, everyone believes that if you're worried that you've committed it, that shows that your heart is not finally hardened against God.

[20:33] Which means you haven't committed it. if you'd like to study it more, both Luke and Mark record this same event so you can see the same conversation play out there with additional details.

And it seems that both Hebrews 6 and 1 John 5 also describe this idea. I have been helped in my own understanding of this by many theologians.

Here is my best explanation of it. What does it look like to do this, right, to commit such a sin? You have to see the clear working of the Holy Spirit and recognize it as such.

And you have to reject it. Not being confused about it or doubting, but actually rejecting it. And you have to call his good work evil. The Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck, a far greater theologian than I, summarized it like this.

The unforgivable sin consists in a conscious and deliberate attribution of God's work to the influence and activity of Satan.

[21:47] A defiant declaration that the Holy Spirit is the spirit from the abyss. That the truth is a lie. That Christ is Satan himself.

Its motivation then is conscious and intentional hatred against God. Friends, it represents a complete and final hardening of the heart against God.

And the Lord says to that person, well, he will not reach down and soften their heart and bring them to the repentance whereby they would find forgiveness. forgiveness. I want to move from that to the other two ideas we see in verses 30 to 32.

The first is found in verse 30. Whoever is not with me and whoever does not gather with me scatters. You see, Jesus was debating the Pharisees, but he is talking past them.

He is speaking to the whole world. He is speaking to me. He is speaking to you. Now, it's true that there are many issues where it's most wise not to take sides.

[23:11] You don't need to reply to that Facebook post. Did you know that? You don't know, or you don't have to weigh in on every issue.

Here's a hint. No one can be qualified to weigh in on everything. But that little reply button tempts us to pretend we are. One of my favorite comic strips shows a man furiously typing at his computer. From off frame comes a voice, are you coming to bed? And he answers, I can't, this is important. What? Someone is wrong on the internet.

The world would be a better place if we took sides less often and held to our positions with a little less vigor and with a little more humility and were slow to speak.

But not this issue. There is no neutrality with Christ. Everyone is by our nature and by our choice naturally an enemy of God.

[24:19] Romans 5. Every person must come to the point where they respond to his call to repent and believe. Either they run to Christ in repentant faith or remain forever his enemy.

There is no third option. God will be to the will ignore him. We will either hail him as king or reserve that spot for ourselves.

Everyone reacts to Christ. The crowds, they marvel. Even his enemies react, right?

They can't deny his works. They have to begin their reply by saying he casts out demons. They're going to twist it, but they have to acknowledge him. You can come to him with awe and wonder, or you can attribute his works to the enemy.

You can bow before him, or you can call him a liar, but there is no ignoring Jesus. So will you marvel at him?

[25:29] At his mercy and power and love? That's Matthew's hope for you, and it is mine as well. And so if you have wondered about Jesus, I'd like to invite you today to wonder at Jesus, to look on him with awe and amazement, to marvel at him as these crowds did, to worship him because he is the true God, the true king, the true rescue from sin and death and hell.

Here in chapter 12, he conquers hell's minions, and before the book of Matthew ends, he will have conquered death and the grave and the sins of the world, forgiving all our trespasses by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands.

This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. That's Colossians 2. Will you come down like the blind and mute man, knowing that you have no power to save yourself, but that he is strong to save, and he is willing?

Will you trust in Jesus, in his goodness, in his power, in his righteousness, and in him find the salvation of your soul? And if you do, and if you have, this last idea, this final idea in this passage

will be true of you.

Jesus begins, verse 31, talking about something that we might overlook because we're distracted by the unforgivable part.

[27:21] He begins and says every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven except that one. Now, two quick clarifications.

First, this does not mean universalism. We don't read this separate from his calls to repent and believe for the forgiveness of sins. We must respond to Christ in repentance and faith for sins to be forgiven.

And second, this does not mean that grace is a synonym for permissiveness. His grace comes free, but at the greatest cost, and it comes with new life.

Jesus calls our salvation new birth, and new life will come from that grace. Next week, he's going to tell us the tree is known by its fruit, new birth produces new life.

Grace is not permissiveness. He loves us too much to leave us contaminated and corrupted by sin's reign. And so those are the two clarifications, and here is what I want us to see when Jesus says every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven.

[28:35] I want us to consider and to be really confronted by the magnitude of His grace. Here's what I mean. Some of us look at our own sin and say, oh my goodness, how could God forgive me?

I've done too much. I've gone too far. I am too guilty, too dirty, unforgivable. To which Jesus says, you, even you, I will forgive.

Friends, He sees and knows your sin better than you do, and He calls you to come and receive forgiveness. Let His immense grace wash over you and heal your soul.

Your sin is not too great because His atoning blood is infinitely great. Friends, a large part of the New Testament was written by the Apostle Paul, who, prior to his conversion, persecuted, imprisoned, and murdered Christians.

Even He found forgiveness in the cross, and so can you. And so, when we are confronted with our own guilt, we do not look within, we look above.

[30:06] Here's what Martin Luther had to say. He said, so, when the devil throws your sins in your face and declares that you deserve death and hell, tell him this, I admit that I deserve death and hell.

What of it? For I know one who suffered and has made satisfaction on my behalf. His name is Jesus Christ, Son of God, and where he is, there I shall be also.

That's why the hymn before the throne of God above has a stanza that reads, when Satan tempts me to despair and tells me of the guilt within, we don't say, well, I was provoked to that.

Come on. We don't say, it wasn't that bad. We don't say, I've cleaned up my act since then. We don't say, I've made amends. No, when we are confronted with the weight of our sins, when Satan tempts me to despair and tells me of the guilt within, upward I look and see him there who made an end of all my sin.

Friends, when we sin, run to Christ. And so let the grace of Jesus Christ be such a comfort to you.

[31:36] And let it confront us. I hope that this is about to make you a little uncomfortable. I want God's grace to confront us in what might be a new and almost extraordinary way.

Our God forgives repentant sinners. Now that sounds good, right, when we look at ourselves, but less so when we look at others. We tend to think less of our own sins and more of others, right? Why? Well, because we're all tempted to be Pharisees. But Jesus is telling us he will forgive every sin but that one, which is simply unrepentant, right?

He will forgive sins that you and I think are too huge. He will forgive sins that we think are too offensive.

He will forgive things we think are too disgraceful. He will forgive drug addicts and their dealers if they repent and believe and pimps and abortionists and abusers of children and rapists and murderers and sinners of every kind that offend your sensibilities and mine if they repent and believe.

[33:08] Does that delight you or does it offend you? How about this? He will forgive that notorious sinner on the news should they repent and believe.

He will forgive sins so appalling that you cannot begin to bring yourself to name them in a whisper.

He will forgive sins of people in a different political party.

He will forgive sins committed against you. Jesus says that his grace is so great that through repentance and faith he will excuse what we never would.

Let this crush the spirit of the Pharisees that might linger in us. And what's more as horrible as these sins sound to us as huge as they feel as filthy as they seem Jesus in his white hot moral purity and in his absolute omniscience seeing and knowing all knows these sins to be far larger and more horrible and filthy than we can understand.

they look unforgivable to us but he knows them to be worse than we can comprehend.

[34:48] We feel they're unforgivable.! He knows them to be worse than we can imagine and still he loves and still he chose to take those sins even those sins on his guiltless spotless pure shoulders and still he chose to bear them on his cross and still he chose to stand in our place and to receive the full weight of divine justice and still he chose to offer you and I and everyone to the ends of the earth forgiveness at what price repent and believe the prophet

Isaiah said come everyone who thirsts come to the waters and he who has no money come buy and eat come buy wine and milk money and without price such is the grace of our God the Bible tells us that the gospel the good news of Jesus Christ his cross and his empty tomb is a stumbling block and an offense and there are two reasons for that the first the one we mostly talk about right it says you're a sinner and you need a savior that's offensive but the second one and the will and does forgive people we despise not because their sins aren't that bad in fact their sins are worse than we can understand not because their sins aren't that bad but because he has paid a price that high oh the glory and the majesty of

God's loving kindness mercy and grace let's pray oh lord our glorious king will you shock and amaze us and cause us to love you more as we see the boundless grace you have for us and father when we are confronted with our own guilt and sin will you help us not to despair not to make excuses not to shut down not to look to ourselves but to look to Christ who made atonement for all our sin we pray that in his name amen to