

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

MAY 30TH-31ST, 2020 // BOOK OF MATTHEW

LORD OF THE SABBATH (MATTHEW 12:1-14)

At this point in the narrative, Jesus and His disciples are teaching, preaching, and ministering in cities across Israel.

- As chapter 12 opens, it's the Sabbath, and Jesus' hungry disciples are shown eating and picking raw grain (vs. 1).
- They are perfectly within the boundaries of the Jewish law according to Deut. 23:25, which allowed a person to pick the grain from their neighbor's field with their bare hands.

But their actions infuriated the Pharisees, who were so legalistic in their interpretation of the Sabbath that the act of rubbing the heads of grain between the palms to separate the kernels from the hulls was seen as "harvesting".

- As legalists, they had added to the requirements of the law.
- The disciples weren't breaking the law of Scripture, only the Pharisees' interpretation of it.

Jesus responds by citing the example of David from 1 Sam. 21:1-9, when he fled from Saul to the city of Nob, where the tabernacle was at the time.

- So that David and his men could survive and be sustained, they ate the consecrated bread that was set apart for the priests (vs. 3-4).
- Jesus also noted how priests in the temple were allowed to work on the Sabbath without dishonoring God (vs. 5).

Based on these two precedents and the fact that as the Son of Man, He was the architect of the temple and the one for whose worship the temple existed- He's greater than the temple (vs. 6).

- The legalism of the Pharisees missed the very heart of the law.
- God's command to observe the Sabbath was an expression of mercy (vs. 7).

Jesus then boldly declares that He's "Lord of the Sabbath" (vs. 8)- that's the reason that He had to right to determine what was appropriate or inappropriate on the Sabbath.

- The action then moves into the synagogue, where a man with a withered hand is presented to Jesus along with a baited question- "is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?" (vs. 10).
- Think of how ridiculous of a scene this is.

Jesus' response didn't appeal to written law, but to common sense and common practice.

- Any Jew was compelled to act mercifully towards an animal in trouble on the Sabbath.
- So He asks, "how much more valuable are human beings than animals?" (vs. 12).
- When the man is healed, the Pharisees are angered, and they begin to plot on how to kill Jesus (vs. 13-14).

BRUISED REEDS & SMOLDERING WICKS (MATTHEW 12:15-21)

In response to the plot to "destroy Him", Jesus retreats, and yet the crowds follow Him (vs. 15).

- Even though the exercise of His power to heal is actually working against Him and threatening His life, Jesus still cannot resist this compassionate urge to "heal them all", though He does warn them again not to tell anyone (vs. 16).

This two-verse description Matthew gives shows us an intimate look into the heart of Jesus.

- Unlike the Pharisees who didn't understand God's heart of compassion towards people, Jesus is moved by the deep needs of the lost sheep around Him.
- He's willing to allow Himself at times to be interrupted so He can show mercy, compassion, and truth to those in great need.

Matthew connects these attributes in Jesus to a prophecy from Isaiah that spoke of a quiet, humble, and just servant of God (vs. 18-19).

- Out of the authority of Yahweh's spirit, this servant would proclaim justice to the nations (vs. 18), but at the same time would not quarrel or cry aloud (vs. 19).
- In other words, He'd behave with meekness- not in a combative, hostile manner.

"A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench" (vs. 20).

- Reeds were the stems of plants used to make ink pens or walking sticks, and were so common that if they got damaged they would just be thrown out.
- Wicks on oil lamps would smolder when low on oil or trimmed improperly, so when damaged it would be put out and relit.

But the Messiah wouldn't discard or throw out even those who are worthless and useless in the eyes of the world.

- Instead, He would welcome them and use them in the purposes of His Kingdom.
- Even though He'd come meekly, He'd also bring justice that would lead to victory and hope for all ethnicities and people (vs. 20-21).
- God loves people more than we can imagine.

A KINGDOM DIVIDED (MATTHEW 12:22-29)

A demon-oppressed man who was blind and mute was brought to Jesus was healed (vs. 22).

- After the healing, the people were amazed and asked, "can this be the Son of David?"
- In all of the Old Testament, only David was able to exorcise a demon from Saul.
- Now someone has come on the scene manifesting the same power.

The Pharisees were disturbed at Jesus' power over demons, so they began to discredit the idea by attributing Jesus' authority to Satan (vs. 24).

- Jesus responds with a very common-sense argument that exposes the ridiculousness and flawed reasoning of their accusations.
- If Satan is driving out Satan, his kingdom/house/city is divided against itself.

Not only did their accusation not make any sense, their logic was inconsistent.

- If casting out demons was a demonic activity, then why didn't the Pharisees criticize their own followers when they cast out demons (vs. 27)?
- This power over the demonic that Jesus possessed had to come from the Spirit of God, which meant that the Kingdom of God had "come upon them" (vs. 28).

Jesus provided further evidence that His power and authority came from God as He spoke of "entering a strong man's house, plundering his goods, and binding the strong man" (vs. 29).

- The only One capable of invading Satan's kingdom, rescuing those who are enslaved by him, and binding Satan to make Him powerless would have to be someone stronger.

When we're enslaved to a religious (or even political) ideology, mindset, or mentality, everything we see gets filtered through the lens of that mindset.

- So much so that when truth challenges our predetermined mindset, instead of admitting that we don't know everything and we may be wrong, we come up with illogical, inconsistent, and absurd explanations.

- This may lead us to miss the work of God right in front of us.

AN UNFORGIVEABLE SIN (MATTHEW 12:30-32)

Jesus says to the Pharisees, "if the Kingdom has come upon you and God is at work in your midst, if you're not with me than you're working against me" (vs. 30).

- There is no remaining "neutral" towards Jesus- anyone who is not seeking to live for Jesus by default is opposing His work.
- Then Jesus gives a very difficult statement for us to interpret in verses 31-32.

A responsible interpretation begins by looking at the overall biblical context, and then at the specific biblical context.

- In the Bible, God is shown as a forgiving God.
- He forgave countless in the Bible for horrible and rebellious sins.

Let's consider the specific context- Jesus is speaking to the Pharisees who are showing themselves to be completely opposed to Him.

- They were saying that Christ's works were NOT through the power of the Spirit, but through the power of Satan.
- To "speak against (or "blaspheme") is essentially to slander, which is what these Pharisees were doing.

Speaking against the Son is forgivable (vs. 32a), and the path to that forgiveness is repentance.

- We see this in the life of Simon Peter and in Paul the Apostle as Jesus graciously pardons those who mock and deny Him when they repent and return.
- Speaking against the Holy Spirit is unforgiveable (vs. 32b), because to do so means to reject the very path to forgiveness.

Jesus is speaking to people who are hardening their heart against Him.

- In attributing the work of God to Satan, they were setting themselves in total opposition to the Spirit of God, the spirit who draws them to salvation through repentance.
- They were rejecting even the thought of repentance through willful unbelief, persistent rebellion, and final denial.

For someone to commit this "unpardonable sin", there must be...

- Willful Unbelief- blaspheming the Spirit's work to draw us to Jesus despite evidence.
- Persistent Rebellion- blaspheming the Spirit's convicting by proudly refusing to repent.
- Final Denial- blaspheming the Spirit by permanently rejecting Christ.

MISSING THE WORK OF GOD

What is God's heart for His people right now?

- "I desire **mercy** (hesed), and not sacrifice..." (vs. 7)
- "Do I **care more about loving God & loving people** or do I care about just being right?"
- "**Am I so enslaved to my own ideology, mindset, or mentality that I'm willing to even argue with God's Word and His Work when it's challenged?**"
- "**Is my heart still soft and receptive to the Spirit of God?** Or am I hardening my heart?"