

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

JUNE 6TH-7TH, 2020 // BOOK OF MATTHEW

A TREE IS KNOWN BY FRUIT (MATTHEW 12:33-37)

Jesus is right in the middle of a confrontation with the Pharisees who had rejected Him as Messiah and attributed His miracles to the works of demons.

- They had hardened their hearts against Jesus and “blasphemed the Spirit” by resisting and rejecting God’s work in their midst.
 - In the next few verses Jesus speaks of an important reality- our words reveal our hearts.
- The unforgiveable sin that Jesus spoke of earlier is not about a particular set of words.
- Rather, this sin that Jesus warns of is what lies beneath what is spoken.
 - In other words, a heart that rejects humble repentance reveals itself by the words that a person speaks.
 - A sin of the heart always manifests itself outwardly through our words.

The fruit that comes from our lips is evidence of what lies within our hearts- if we’re a “good tree” or a “bad tree” (vs. 33).

- What we believe in our hearts makes a difference in the words that we speak.
- Jesus asks this group, “how is it even possible for you to speak good when your heart is evil?” (vs. 34-35).
- The outside is simply a reflection of the inside.

Not only do a person’s words demonstrate their inner character in the present day, they will also be either their defense or incrimination on the “day of judgment” (vs. 36-37).

- When Jesus talks about “careless words”, He’s not so much talking about casual or idle conversation, but rather empty or dishonest words, insincere or broken promises, and abusive or violent language.

“Careless words” are like loaded guns that are handled recklessly.

- Here’s the point- words matter because words have great power and reveal what really going on in our hearts.
- The only way we can ensure that our words bring life, encouragement and goodness is to make sure that those things are on the inside of us.
- This is a call to have a regenerated heart!

THE SIGN OF JONAH (MATTHEW 12:38-42)

As if they hadn’t seen enough already, the scribes and the Pharisees asked Jesus for a sign to prove that He’d come from God (vs. 38).

- Jesus answers them with a strong rebuke, calling their sign-seeking an indicator that they were a “wicked and adulterous generation” (vs. 39a).
- They didn’t really want God in their midst working His miracles- they wanted God on their own terms doing the things they wanted.

God is at work all around us- in the seen and in the unseen- but sometimes we don’t like the fact that He’s not doing things on our terms and timetable.

- So we can also demand “signs” for Him to prove that He loves and is with us instead of praising for Him for the things He has done and is doing.
- Jesus says, “no sign will be given except the sign of the prophet Jonah” (vs. 39b).

Jonah was alive after three days in the belly of the great fish, and Jesus would be alive after three days in a grave.

- Just as a fish swallowed up Jonah, a prophet who was delivered from death, so too the grave would swallow up Jesus and He would be delivered from death.
- Upon Jonah’s deliverance, the pagan Ninevites responded with repentance.

But Israel was responding with rejection!

- Jesus says that those same pagans from Nineveh will condemn the stubborn and unbelieving Pharisees on the day of judgment (vs. 41).
- The Queen of the South (Sheba, modern day Yemen or Ethiopia) who traveled to see God’s blessing on Solomon’s kingdom and to hear His wisdom honor Yahweh will also condemn this generation (vs. 42).

Why? Because something greater than a prophet or even a King was in their midst.

- The very word of God and the King of all Kings was walking amongst them and inviting them to Himself.
- But because He wasn’t telling them what they wanted to hear how they wanted to hear it- they rejected Him and hardened their heart.
- We reject the Biblical Jesus and His message often in favor of one that we’ve made up that looks like us and never challenges our ideals or beliefs (2 Tim. 4:3).

UNCLEAN SPIRITS (MATTHEW 12:43-45)

Jesus has done quite of exorcisms at this point in the narrative.

- When demons leave a physical body, they apparently are restless (Matt. 8:28-31).
- This house (a person’s life or body) has been cleaned out and all the unclean spirits have been cast out- but now it’s empty.

It’s orderly, but it has no-one living inside to give it power to continue living in freedom.

- But what have they done with their newfound freedom that Jesus has given them?
- They’ve “swept their houses clean and put them in order” (vs. 44).
- They’ve self-reformed and become religious, but ultimately, they’re still empty.

So what happens to an “empty house”?

- According to Jesus, it’s inhabited by seven other demons more evil, and the “last state of that person is worse than the first” (vs. 45).
- This is specifically talking about “this evil generation”.
- This generation may have put their house in order, but they hadn’t allowed it to be filled by the Spirit of the Kingdom of God- in fact, they’ve blasphemed that Spirit.

And now, because of their rejection of Jesus and the Spirit that bore witness to His work, they were going to be dwelt by “seven spirits” more wicked than the first.

- The spirits of legalism, Christ-less religion, and Spiritual pride are perhaps more wicked and sinister than even those spirits that influence pagan nations.
- How does someone fall victim to these “spirits”?

By simply adhering to an outward conformity or a set of religious standards without allowing the heart to be regenerated by the Spirit of God.

- Ultimately this kind of religious practice makes our inner lives “empty”.
- We’re instead filled with pride, disdain for others not as “spiritual” as we are, hatred, jealousy, discord, impurity, etc. (Gal. 5:19-20).

What makes this so evil is that these kinds of “spirits” give us a false sense of security in our own selves that leads us to rejecting Jesus because we don’t think we need Him.

- In the American South, this is the predominating spirit at work- addicted to empty religious practices void of true regeneration from the Spirit of God.

A NEW FAMILY (MATTHEW 12:46-50)

Jesus was not dishonoring His blood relatives (mother & brothers) (vs. 48).

- John 19:25-27 tells us that Jesus cared for His mother, and some of Jesus’ brothers (James & Jude) went on to write Scripture and lead in the early church.
- He’s not disrespecting the human institution, instead He’s inviting us to a new family.

Rather than legalism, Jesus points us in another direction for the answer

- If we don’t need religion consumed with outward reformation, then what do we need?
- We need an intimate relationship driven by inner transformation.
- Jesus says that those who do God’s will are part of His family

The head of this new family is God the Father, and membership is determined not by blood relations but by a relationship with the Father through covenant faith in the Son, as evidenced by obedience to His will (vs. 50).

- In His humanity, Jesus was like us in every way, only He is without sin (Heb. 4:15).
- He alone is righteous, perfectly obedient to the law, stronger than Satan.

On the basis of His work, Jesus invites us into His family and makes it possible for us to be called sons and daughters of God.

- When we turn from sin & self and trust in Him alone, we are brought into God’s family by the power of His spirit.
- This is the relationship that brings about inner transformation and regenerated hearts.
- You need a family more than you need a religion.

You need a relationship with a Father more than you need rules or religious practices.

- You need an “older brother” to follow (Rom. 8:29) more than you need an impersonal, mythical figure to try and emulate.
- You need a Spirit to empower you and change your heart from the inside out more than you need standards that can’t live up to.

Our outward lives matter but they’re only indicators of what’s inside our hearts (12:33-37).

Stubborn, prideful hearts refuse to listen to Jesus’ words and accept Him as He is (12:38-42). Empty, self-centered religion and moralism is ultimately demonic and damning (12:43-45).

Jesus’ offer is not more rules, religion, or regulations- it’s relationship & regeneration (12:46-50).

As the world continues to grow darker, as the Church we cannot exchange radical encounters with and the inward work of God in our hearts for religious activity or cultural affiliations.