

Week 13

Matthew series: Ministry of Jesus:

Matthew 12:22-50 **The religious atmosphere part 2**

I had a fella spend time with me for three months building a new friendship. One day he questioned me on several things I believed about Christianity. I did not give the answers he wanted. The man closed his Bible and walked out: friendship over. With religion, there seems to be a really big line. You are either on one side or another. Matthew 12: 22-32 is a defining line between heaven and hell. You could also say between God's kingdom and religion. The religious rulers have decided that Jesus is of the Devil. The response from Jesus on evil is brilliant.

They asked Jesus who he was. Actually, many people asked Jesus who he was. With so many traditions and scriptures, it was hard to know for sure. The religious rulers knew. Yet, they wanted to cast doubt on the people. The other two verses I quote ask the same of John the Baptist. Who is he to God? Can you tell evil intent or have you been fooled?

Matthew 12:24 **"But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons."**

Malachi 4:5 **"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes."**

Matthew 11:14 **"and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come."**

Hosea 9:10 says: **"Like grapes in the wilderness, I found Israel. Like the first fruit on the fig tree, in its first season, I saw your ancestors. But they came to Baal-peor, and consecrated themselves to a thing of shame, and became detestable like the thing they loved."** Jesus is quoted several times in relation to the fig tree. It's believed that the mention of the fig tree is in relation to Israel. There are many verses in the Old Testament in regards to the fig tree. Look at Micha 4:4 **"but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken."** Jesus mentions the fig tree in Matthew 12 because good and bad fruit are known to Jewish people as good and evil. Again, Jesus takes what the religious rulers throw at him and delivers it back to them on a Biblical platter. Have you ever been accused of being evil?

Matthew 12:30 **"Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters."**

Exodus 7:17 **“This is what the Lord says: By this you will know that I am the Lord: With the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water of the Nile, and it will be changed into blood.”**

We tend to see the word Jonah and think of a fish story. What if evil was the real story. Nineveh was an evil place. I suspect in Jesus day it was considered the worst place like saying Go to hell, they would say go to Nineveh. The second half of this chapter is an understanding of what evil is and is not. Jesus of course takes it a step farther. He points out that looking clean only means you might be empty inside. It also means that empty spaces invite trouble like evil spirits. The last part of this chapter caps it off with a discussion about the true family. Family are those who share in the kingdom of God. There is a ton to unpack in the second part of this chapter.

Matthew 12:43 **“When an impure spirit comes out of a person, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it.”**

1 Samuel 15:16 **“And Saul’s servants said to him, “Behold now, a harmful spirit from God is tormenting you.”**

Read Matthew 12:22-50, Jerimiah 24 for next week.

1. It’s so easy to read the Bible and see what we want to see. Jesus is being attacked by the religious rulers here in Matthew 12. Don’t you find it interesting that Satan never attacks him? Yet Jesus is being accused of being of the Devil. Who is offending who? The crowd wonders who this Jesus is. Is he the *Son of David*? That Guy was to rescue them all from the Romans. He was the Messiah, Christ, and God’s deliverer. Can you see that the religious rulers are not asking those questions? I want you to think about the theme of evil in this study today. The question should be *what is evil*? I think Matthew is telling the Jewish readers that evil is not where they thought it was. Religion can go to seed. That seems a tough pill to swallow when it comes to church things. Verse 22 begins with evil spirits. Jesus ends with a claim in verse 32 that the good holy Spirit should not be dished.

Matthew 12:32 **“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.”**

Nehemiah 9:20 **“you gave Your good Spirit to instruct them, Your manna You did not withhold from their mouth, And You gave them water for their thirst.**

2. This section of Matthew is so cool. I love fig talk. So many times, Jesus goes off and begins to talk about crazy stuff. He asks people to tear out their eyes. Jesus says we can’t strain a Nat or

put a camel through the eye of a needle. His parables are legendary for being hard to understand. So, what is all this fig talk beginning in verse 33. Well Jesus calls the religious rulers a brood of vipers. John the Baptist called them that too. The fig tree has traditionally been attributed to Israel as a nation. Read Jeremiah 24 and you will begin to get it. Jesus is telling these men that the fig tree is producing bad fruit. I think that is why throughout the gospels Jesus talks about vines, trimming, and fig trees. I feel that Jesus is intentionally enticing them to kill him. Jesus was insinuating the religion of his day needed to be pruned.

Matthew 12:33 "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."

Jerimiah 24:3 "Then the Lord asked me, "What do you see, Jeremiah?" "Figs," I answered. "The good ones are very good, but the bad ones are so bad they cannot be eaten."

3. Section 38-42 is a crazy section of the Bible. Imagine religious leaders being blind to God. It's by no mistake that Jesus heals the demonic man who was blind and could not talk. The religious rulers do a lot of talking yet they are spiritually blind. Jesus calls them an adulteress generation and brood of vipers. He mentions that the evil Nineveh is more honorable than this generation. The Queen of the south crushed Israel years after Solomon showed her the kingdom. Jesus says that same thing will happen again. This section of written is by no mistake. The ears of Israel knew exactly what Jesus was driving at. Adulteress means they were in bed with the wrong crowd. Check out 1 Kings 10 for more insight. What is clear is that Jesus uses Jonah because people use that story so often to disregard the Bibles validity. Jesus is challenging them on the validity of their beliefs.

Matthew 12:41 "The people of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the proclamation of Jonah, and see, something greater than Jonah is here!"

Jerimiah 50:17 ""Israel is a scattered flock that lions have chased away. The first to devour them was the king of Assyria; the last to crush their bones was Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon."

4. Verses 43 -50 wrap up the problem with this generation. It's the same in our times too. We want to look clean. In many ways, we try and be clean. There are programs and pills to feel better. We frown on unhappiness. Yet, in the kingdom of God unhappiness is the right pill. To be unsettled means we need help. People usually don't need God during good times. That is too bad. Troubles comes because we don't invite God in the good times as we should. The religious rulers tried hard to sweep their homes clean in their hearts. Jesus said they opened the door for Satan to come back with friends. The last part is the tricky part. Who are your friends and family? Who do you trust and rely on? I get it that family is not a choice. However, a family of godly people is a good thing. It might be easier to know who is evil and what shape your house is in when you surround yourself with God.

Matthew 12:50 "For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

Genesis 50:20 **“As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.**

What it all means?

I split this chapter in two because I saw Jesus set the climate in the first part. He then points to our hearts. We can come to God for various reasons. We can take this word and twist it to mean anything we want. Is this chapter all about bad religion? No, the Bible can be called Basic Instructions, before, leaving Earth. I know it's cheesy but cute. Yet, that is it in a nut shell. Matthew 12 is asking us to beware of ourselves in religion. Through the actions of the religious rulers we could see our future. A future where we fold up our Bible and walk out. That fella I mentioned at the beginning was more interested in religion than friendship.

Is it so hard to believe in Jonah and a whale? Is it so hard to believe in the Genesis version of creation? Why must we make rules to make us comfortable in our understanding. In Jesus day, one group believed in resurrection. Another in miracles. Each group rejected the other. We have God's word today. Yet, here we stand with several hundred different denominations and cults. Why? Because Matthew 12 was a warning we refused to believe. That man will try to place himself as God.

Since the beginning, Adam and Eve were trying to be God. So, did the people of Babel. So, did the religious rulers in Jesus time. Today we have men who claim to be God or at-least Gods prophet. Men and women cannot submit to the Lord without conditions. Jesus points out that coming to God unconditionally is the only way like a child. We are not spiritually blind by force. One step at a time we build walls to God. Soon enough we can't see Eden or heaven. This Chapter is a warning to us all. Let God create our Christianity. Otherwise we will repeat the sins of the past religious rulers.

Matthew 12:50 **“For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”**

Exodus 19:8 **“The people all responded together, "We will do everything the LORD has said." So Moses brought their answer back to the LORD.”**