

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown
Bible Study Notes
9-6-23

Matthew 12

Pharisees Condemn The Disciples – Verses 1-2

12 At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some heads of grain and eat them. ²When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, “Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath.”

12:1-2 The Pharisees had established 39 categories of actions forbidden on the Sabbath, based on interpretations of God’s law and on Jewish custom. Harvesting was one of those forbidden actions. By picking wheat and rubbing it in their hands, the disciples were technically harvesting, according to the Pharisees. Jesus and the disciples were picking grain because they were hungry, not because they wanted to harvest the grain for a profit. They were not working on the Sabbath. The Pharisees, however, could not (and did not want to) see beyond their law’s technicalities. They had no room for compassion, and they were determined to accuse Jesus of wrongdoing.

Jesus Defends His Disciples – Verses 3-8

³He answered, “Haven’t you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? ⁴He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread—which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests. ⁵Or haven’t you read in the Law that the priests on Sabbath duty in the temple desecrate the Sabbath and yet are innocent? ⁶I tell you that something greater than the temple is here. ⁷If you had known what these words mean, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the innocent. ⁸For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.”

12:4 This story is recorded in 1 Samuel 21:1-6. The bread of the Presence was replaced every week, and the old loaves were eaten by the priests. The loaves given to David were the old loaves that had just been replaced with fresh ones. Although the priests were the only ones allowed to eat this bread, God did not punish David because his need for food was more important than the priestly regulations. Jesus was saying, “If you condemn me, you must also condemn David,” something the religious leaders could never do without causing a great uproar among the people. Jesus was not condoning disobedience to God’s laws. Instead, he was emphasizing discernment and compassion in enforcing the laws.

12:5 The Ten Commandments prohibit work on the Sabbath (Exodus 20:8-11). That was the letter of the law. But because the purpose of the Sabbath is to rest and to worship God, the priests were allowed to work by performing sacrifices and conducting worship services. This “Sabbath work” was serving and worshipping God. Jesus always emphasized the intent of the law, the meaning behind the letter. The Pharisees had lost the spirit of the law and were rigidly demanding that the letter (and their interpretation of it) be obeyed.

12:6 The Pharisees were so concerned about religious rituals that they missed the whole purpose of the temple—to bring people to God. And because Jesus Christ is even greater than the temple, how much better can he bring people to God. God is far more important than the created instruments

of worship. If we become more concerned with the means of worship than with the one we worship, we will miss God even as we think we are worshiping him.

12:7 Jesus repeated to the Pharisees words the Jewish people had heard time and again throughout their history (1 Samuel 15:22-23; Psalm 40:6-8; Isaiah 1:11-17; Jeremiah 7:21-23; Hosea 6:6). Our heart attitude toward God comes first. Only then can we properly obey and observe religious regulations and rituals.

12:8 When Jesus said he was Lord of the Sabbath, he claimed to be greater than the law and above the law. To the Pharisees, this was heresy. They did not realize that Jesus, the divine Son of God, had created the Sabbath. The Creator is always greater than his creation; thus, Jesus had the authority to overrule their traditions and regulations.

A Controversy Regarding Healing On The Sabbath – Verses 9-14

⁹ Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue, ¹⁰ and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Looking for a reason to bring charges against Jesus, they asked him, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” ¹¹ He said to them, “If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? ¹² How much more valuable is a person than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.” ¹³ Then he said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” So he stretched it out and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other. ¹⁴ But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus.

12:10 As they pointed to the man with the shriveled hand, the Pharisees tried to trick Jesus by asking him if it was legal to heal on the Sabbath. Their Sabbath rules said that people could be helped on the Sabbath only if their lives were in danger. Jesus healed on the Sabbath several times, and none of those healings were in response to emergencies. If Jesus had waited until another day, he would have been submitting to the Pharisees’ authority, showing that their petty rules were equal to God’s law. If he healed the man on the Sabbath, the Pharisees could claim that because Jesus broke their rules, his power was not from God. But Jesus made it clear how ridiculous and petty their rules were. God is a God of people, not rules. The best time to reach out to someone is when he or she needs help.

12:10-12 The Pharisees placed their laws above human need. They were so concerned about Jesus breaking one of their rules that they did not care about the man’s shriveled hand. What is your attitude toward others? If your convictions don’t allow you to help certain people, your convictions may not be in tune with God’s Word. Don’t allow rule keeping to blind you to human need.

12:14 The Pharisees plotted Jesus’ death because they were proud, fearful, and outraged. Jesus had overruled their authority (Luke 6:11) and had exposed their evil attitudes in front of the entire crowd in the synagogue. Jesus had showed that the Pharisees were more loyal to their religious system than to God.

God’s Chosen Servant – Verses 15-21

¹⁵ Aware of this, Jesus withdrew from that place. A large crowd followed him, and he healed all who were ill. ¹⁶ He warned them not to tell others about him. ¹⁷ This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: ¹⁸ “Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations. ¹⁹ He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets. ²⁰ A bruised reed he will

not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he has brought justice through to victory. ²¹In his name the nations will put their hope.”

12:15 Up to this point, Jesus had been aggressively confronting the Pharisees’ hypocrisy. Here he decided to withdraw from the synagogue before a major confrontation developed because it was not yet time for him to die. Jesus had many lessons still to teach his disciples and the people.

12:16 Jesus did not want those he healed to tell others about his miracles because he didn’t want the people coming to him for the wrong reasons. That would hinder his teaching ministry and arouse false hopes about an earthly kingdom. But the news of Jesus’ miracles spread, and many came to see for themselves (see Mark 3:7-8).

12:17-21 The people expected the Messiah to be a king. This quotation from Isaiah’s prophecy (Isaiah 42:1-4) showed that the Messiah was indeed a king, but it illustrated what kind of king—a gentle ruler who brings justice to the nations. Like the crowd in Jesus’ day, we may want Christ to rule as a king and bring great and visible victories in our lives. But often Christ’s work is quiet, and it happens according to his perfect timing, not ours.

Jesus Delivers A Man Possessed By A Demon – Verses 22-24

²² Then they brought him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see. ²³ All the people were astonished and said, “Could this be the Son of David?” ²⁴ But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, “It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons.”

12:24 The Pharisees had already accused Jesus of being empowered by the prince of demons (9:34). They were trying to discredit him by using an emotional argument. Refusing to believe that Jesus came from God, they said he was in league with Satan. Jesus easily exposed the foolishness of their argument.

Jesus Answers The Accusation That He Works By Satan’s Power – Verses 25-29

²⁵ Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand. ²⁶ If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? ²⁷ And if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your people drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. ²⁸ But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. ²⁹ “Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man’s house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can plunder his house.

12:25 In the Incarnation, Jesus gave up the complete and unlimited use of his supernatural abilities. But he still had profound insight into human nature. His discernment stopped the religious leaders’ attempts to trick him. The resurrected Christ knows all our thoughts. This can be comforting because he knows what we really mean when we speak to him. It can be threatening because we cannot hide from him, and he knows any selfish motives.

12:29 At Jesus’ birth, Satan’s power and control were disrupted. In the wilderness Jesus overcame Satan’s temptations, and at the Resurrection he defeated Satan’s ultimate weapon—death. Eventually Satan will be constrained forever (Revelation 20:10), and evil will no longer pervade the earth. Jesus has complete power and authority over Satan and all his forces.

He Who Is Not With Me – Verses 30-32

³⁰ “Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. ³¹ And so I tell you, every kind of sin and slander can be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. ³² Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

12:30 It is impossible to be neutral about Christ. Anyone who is not actively following him has chosen to reject him. Any person who tries to remain neutral in the struggle of good against evil is choosing to be separated from God, who alone is good. To refuse to follow Christ is to choose to be on Satan’s team.

12:31-32 The Pharisees had blasphemed against the Spirit by attributing the power by which Christ did miracles to Satan (12:24) instead of the Holy Spirit. The unpardonable sin is the deliberate refusal to acknowledge God’s power in Christ. It indicates a deliberate and irreversible hardness of heart. Sometimes believers worry that they have accidentally committed this unforgivable sin. But only those who have turned their backs on God and rejected all faith have any need to worry. Jesus said they can’t be forgiven—not because their sin is worse than any other but because they will never ask for forgiveness. Whoever rejects the prompting of the Holy Spirit removes himself or herself from the only force that can lead him or her to repentance and restoration to God.

Religious Leaders Depravity Of Their Hearts – Verses 33-37

³³ “Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. ³⁴ You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. ³⁵ A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. ³⁶ But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. ³⁷ For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.”

12:34-36 Jesus reminds us that what we say reveals what is in our hearts. What kinds of words come from your mouth? That is an indication of what is in your heart. You can’t solve your heart problem, however, just by cleaning up your speech. You must allow the Holy Spirit to fill you with new attitudes and motives; then your speech will be cleansed at its source.

The Sign Of Jonah – Verses 38-40

³⁸ Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, “Teacher, we want to see a sign from you.” ³⁹ He answered, “A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. ⁴⁰ For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

12:38-40 The Pharisees were asking for another miraculous sign, but they were not sincerely seeking to know Jesus. Jesus knew they had already seen enough miraculous proof to convince them that he was the Messiah if they would just open their hearts. But they had already decided not to believe in him, and more miracles would not change that.

12:38-40 Many people have said, “If I could just see a real miracle, then I could really believe in God.” But Jesus’ response to the Pharisees applies to us. We have plenty of evidence—Jesus’ birth, death, resurrection, and ascension, and centuries of his work in believers around the world. Instead of looking for additional evidence or miracles, accept what God has already given and move forward. He may use your life as evidence to reach another person.

Jesus Condemns Religious Leaders – Verses 41-42

41 The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now something greater than Jonah is here. **42** The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon’s wisdom, and now something greater than Solomon is here.

12:39-41 Jonah was a prophet sent to the Assyrian city of Nineveh (see the book of Jonah). Because Assyria was such a cruel and warlike nation, Jonah tried to run from his assignment and ended up spending three days in the belly of a huge fish. When Jonah got out, he grudgingly went to Nineveh, preached God’s message, and saw the city repent. By contrast, when Jesus came to his people, they refused to repent. Here Jesus is clearly saying that his resurrection will prove he is the Messiah. Three days after his death, Jesus will come back to life, just as Jonah was given a new chance at life after three days in the fish.

12:41-42 In Jonah’s day, Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian Empire, and it was as evil as it was powerful (Jonah 1:2). But the entire city repented at Jonah’s preaching. The “Queen of the South” (queen of Sheba) traveled far to see Solomon, king of Israel, and learn about his great wisdom (1 Kings 10:1-10). These Gentiles recognized the truth about God when it was presented to them, unlike the religious leaders who ignored the truth even though it stared them in the face. How have you responded to the evidence and truth that you have?

Dangerous Consequences Of Rejecting Jesus – Verses 43-45

43 “When an impure spirit comes out of a person, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. **44** Then it says, ‘I will return to the house I left.’ When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. **45** Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that person is worse than the first. That is how it will be with this wicked generation.”

12:43-45 Jesus was describing the attitude of the nation of Israel and the religious leaders in particular. Just cleaning up one’s life without filling it with God leaves plenty of room for Satan to enter. The book of Ezra records how the people rid themselves of idolatry but failed to replace it with love for God and obedience to him. Ridding our lives of sin is the first step. We must also take the second step: filling our lives with God’s Word and the Holy Spirit. Unfilled and complacent people are easy targets for Satan.

Jesus’ Mother and Brothers – Verses 46-50

46 While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. **47** Someone told him, “Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you.” **48** He replied to him, “Who is my mother, and who are my

brothers?”⁴⁹ Pointing to his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers.⁵⁰ For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

12:46-50 Jesus was not denying his responsibility to his earthly family. On the contrary, he criticized the religious leaders for not following the Old Testament command to honor their parents (15:1-9). He provided for his mother’s security as he hung on the cross (John 19:25-27). His mother and brothers were present in the upper room at Pentecost (Acts 1:14). Instead, Jesus was pointing out that spiritual relationships are as binding as physical ones, and he was paving the way for a new community of believers (the universal church), our spiritual family.