

Matthew 12:22-37

A Tree is Known by Its Fruit

Introduction

Have you ever been accused of something that wasn't true? How did it make you feel? How did you respond? Where you angry? Upset? Hurt? Sad? It's easy to react negatively to false accusations. Jesus is accused of being a servant of Satan. We are going to examine Jesus' response to this accusation using three words: (1) Wisdom, (2) Challenge and (3) Actions.

Section 1: 12:22-29 - Wisdom

²² Then a demon-possessed man who was blind and unable to speak was brought to him. He healed him, so that the man could both speak and see. ²³ All the crowds were astounded and said, "Could this be the Son of David?" ²⁴ When the Pharisees heard this, they said, "This man drives out demons only by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons." ²⁵ Knowing their thoughts, he told them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is headed for destruction, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. ²⁶ If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? ²⁷ And if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons drive them out? For this reason they will be your judges. ²⁸ If I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. ²⁹ How can someone enter a strong man's house and steal his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can plunder his house. (CSB)

Have you ever heard an argument built upon emotions rather than fact and logic? An argument built upon emotions can easily be refuted with wisdom. Jesus is accused of being an agent of Satan. How does He respond first? With wisdom.

Jesus heals a demon possessed man. The crowds begin to talk about Jesus being the "Son of David". Which is code for being the Messiah (2 Samuel 7). The Pharisees try to quickly discredit Jesus being the Messiah. They do this by accusing Him of either working for Satan or being Satan Himself. The name Beelzebul is a strange word. It can mean, "lord of the dung pile" or "lord of the flies." However you translate it, it was meant to associate Jesus with Satan. Why? Because they could no longer deny His power. His ability to perform miracles is undeniable, therefore, their only play was to say that His power comes from Satan.

We see two very different responses to a man being healed. The crowd stood astounded and the Pharisees stood hating. Why the different responses? The Pharisees desired power and position. Jesus threatened that. "If" He is the Messiah, then they lose both. Too many times in life we get so consumed with personal desires and goals we lose sight of what is truly important. We are reminded again that the Pharisees had turned their faith into a ritual rather than a relationship.

Then we have Jesus' response. Jesus responded immediately, but He doesn't lose His temper or get into a childlike argument (no I'm not, you are). He simply begins giving an illustration about a house divided against itself can not stand. Jesus gets straight to the point and the Pharisees have no response. There is no argument that can challenge the wisdom of God.

Application

How should we handle accusations and arguments from the world? With wisdom. But not with man's wisdom, but with God's wisdom. As we all know, just because one wins an argument, it doesn't mean that the other side will

accept the outcome. As believers we have to come to grips with the reality that the world will hate us. Jesus outright explains this to us in John 15:18-19:

¹⁸ "If the world hates you, understand that it hated me before it hated you. ¹⁹ If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own. However, because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of it, the world hates you. (CSB)

Discussion Questions

- ❖ Do you make life decisions based upon your "feelings" or Godly wisdom? Why is it so easy to make decisions based on emotions?
- ❖ Jesus responds with wisdom. When you are accused or lied about, how can you respond with wisdom?
- ❖ The Pharisees loved their power and position more than a relationship with God. Why is it so dangerous to love the things of the world more than God?
- ❖ What are some steps we can take to make sure we walk in wisdom rather than on our emotions?

Section 2: 12:30-32 - Challenged

³⁰ Anyone who is not with me is against me, and anyone who does not gather with me scatters. ³¹ Therefore, I tell you, people will be forgiven every sin and blasphemy, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. ³² Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the one to come. (CSB)

Have you ever been challenged? When I think of being challenged, I think of my time playing various sports. Each coach had a unique way to challenge and push us to be better. Often the physical challenges were tough. As tough as the challenges were, we would have never reached our goals without them.

Jesus challenges the people in verses 30-32. At this moment Jesus draws a line in the sand. You are for Me or against Me. Too many times people try to live in the "middle". For Christians we too often try to have a foot in the world and a hand on God. Jesus doesn't ask for a part of us, He demands all of us.

Jesus gives an ultimatum much like Joshua did to the Israelites in Joshua 24:14-15. What is the separating factor? Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. Why the Holy Spirit? Why not blasphemy of the Father or the Son? Why is blasphemy of the Holy Spirit the one sin that is unforgiveable? I believe within the context of these verses and in Mark 3:20-35 we can draw a connection between our salvation and the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the person that convicts us of sin and seals our salvation. If you reject the work of the Holy Spirit, there is no hope of salvation. You can blaspheme the Father but if the Holy Spirit brings conviction and you repent you can be forgiven. But if you reject the prompting of the Holy Spirit...salvation will pass you by. John Piper states is this way:

"If we blaspheme and reject the Father and the Son, there is still hope, for the Spirit may yet work within us to humble us and bring us to repentance. But if behind the Father and the Son we see and taste the power of the Holy Spirit and reject his work as no more precious than the work of Satan, we shut ourselves off from the only one who could ever bring us to repentance. And so we shut ourselves off from forgiveness."

And Craig Bloomberg makes this statement:

"If one rejects the Spirit of God in Jesus, there is no one else in all the cosmos who can provide salvation."

How do you know if you have committed such a sin? How do we know that the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is tied to salvation? Adrian Rogers explains it well.

If you think you've committed the unpardonable sin, I will tell you this: if you want to be saved, you haven't. Anybody who wants to come, will. And Jesus said, "If any man will come unto Me, I will never turn him away." Never.

The only sin that will separate believers and unbelievers in the end is the rejection of the Holy Spirit's call to accept the gospel. Believers and unbelievers will share all sins except that one. And that one makes all the difference. Accepting the gospel is the work of God through the Holy Spirit. And when we accept the gospel, the blood of Christ washes us clean and places His righteousness upon our account.

The challenge has been given. Submit to the call of God and have life or reject the conviction of the Holy Spirit and be condemned.

Application

We must consistently remind ourselves that eternity is real and the gospel is our only hope. We need a sense of urgency in sharing the gospel. Time is short and we are not guaranteed tomorrow.

Discussion Questions

- ❖ Have you accepted the challenge of Jesus, in other words are you all in?
- ❖ What is holding you back from fully and completely living for God's glory?
- ❖ Why is the pull of the world so strong? How do we battle this pull?
- ❖ Why is the gospel so important?
- ❖ Are you willing to share the gospel?

Section 3: 12:33-37 - Actions

³³ "Either make the tree good and its fruit will be good, or make the tree bad and its fruit will be bad; for a tree is known by its fruit. ³⁴ Brood of vipers! How can you speak good things when you are evil? For the mouth speaks from the overflow of the heart. ³⁵ A good person produces good things from his storeroom of good, and an evil person produces evil things from his storeroom of evil. ³⁶ I tell you that on the day of judgment people will have to account for every careless word they speak. ³⁷ For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned." (CSB)

When was the last time you picked up a drink thinking it was one thing but it was something different? That can be a surprising or disappointing moment. The worst is when you go to drink sweet tea and it's unsweet.

The Pharisees are like the unsweet tea. They appear to be good religious leaders but they are a "brood of vipers". Jesus explains that a person is known by their actions. Have you ever heard the saying, "actions speak louder than words"? This is basically what Jesus is saying...your actions prove your heart, not your words.

A person of God should produce good fruit. What is good fruit? Let's read Galatians 5:16-26:

¹⁶ I say, then, walk by the Spirit and you will certainly not carry out the desire of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh desires what is against the Spirit, and the Spirit desires what is against the flesh; these are opposed to each other, so that you don't do what you want. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, moral impurity, promiscuity, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, carousing, and anything similar. I am warning you about these things—as I warned you before—that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, and self-control. The law is not against such things. ²⁴Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

Here we see Paul explaining what is not and what is the “fruit” of the Spirit. Notice the word fruit is singular. Why? Because the fruit of the Spirit is not like the gifts of the Spirit. Not everyone will have all the gifts but we should have all the “fruit”. Believers should be known for love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. This list should characterize all our actions.

Application

How do we know if we are producing good fruit? Mediate on Galatians 5:22-23 and ask yourself, does this describe me? We must remember that our ability to produce good fruit is directly tied to our relationship with our heavenly Father. The fruit of the Spirit is an overflow from this relationship. As your relationship with your heavenly Father grows, so will the fruit. Think of an apple tree. When it is young, fruit maybe sparse. But as it grows, the fruit becomes abundant. And just as the apple tree needs water, sun and soil to grow...you and I need the Bible, prayer and church to grow.

Discussion Questions

- ❖ Our actions reveal our hearts. Why are our actions more important than our words?
- ❖ How does what you read, watch, listen to and experience impact your actions?
- ❖ What steps are you taking in your life to make sure your actions are God honoring?
- ❖ Which of the fruit from Galatians 5:22-23 do you struggle with the most? Why?
- ❖ What are some things we can do to help our relationship with God grow?

Conclusion

Jesus responds with wisdom, issues a challenge and exposes our actions. Urgency is our word for the day. We must be urgent in knowing and proclaim God to the world. We must be urgent in glorifying God with our lives. We must not be urgent in storing up treasures here on earth, but storing up treasure in heaven.