

Matthew 20-08-30a

This is Sunday, the 30th of August, 2020. We continue our study in the Gospel of Matthew. We're in chapter 12.

We're going to be picking up this morning at verse 38. We're in the middle of a very interesting section. You'll recall that of the structure of Matthew with the introduction and the conclusion and there are five great sections that comprise the bulk of the book and we are precisely in the middle and it is significant because there is a great turning point in the passage we're looking at this morning.

And we'll see it, we'll see it structurally, we'll see it in the content, but Jesus is going to be asked a question by the scribes and Pharisees. Sometimes you have Jesus asking questions, many times he will answer a question with a question, but the answers to those questions are always informative and instructive for us and nowhere more so than here. It's going to be extremely pertinent both to the context of our study to the progress of the ministry of the Lord Jesus in Israel and provides application for us in the times in which we now live which are, as John Lennon said, strange days indeed.

So we'll take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship and our study and then we will pick up this morning in Matthew chapter 12 verse 38. Shall we pray? Father how blessed we are to have the privilege of addressing ourselves as we do this morning directly to you. We come boldly before your throne of grace to find grace to help in time of need.

We have this privilege because of the tremendous work of the Lord Jesus Christ on our behalf to redeem us, to satisfy the requirements of your justice, to reconcile us to you, to solve the problem of our sinfulness, our innate corruption, our sins that we commit by way of failure and shortcoming. All of these things have been resolved through your perfect plan, powered by your Holy Spirit, accomplished by your Son, the Lord Jesus. And we are grateful and we thank you this morning for the many blessings that come to us as a result.

We pray that this passage that we look at this morning will be a blessing to each heart, that your spirit will minister it to each one of us in a meaningful and effective way to fuel our hope, to motivate our souls, to encourage us and give us clarity as we analyze the tasks and the potentials that come to us each day, that we can redeem the time despite the fact that the days are evil. We can be thoroughly equipped for every good work both now and in the ages to come. We pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen. Before we read our passage, I want to review what we have covered in this chapter, beginning at verse 22. As I've said, there is a real beginning of a chiastic structure here that ties back to Matthew 7 with this one who is brought to him that is demon possessed.

Actually, I knew that was wrong. It's chapter 9, verse 32, when they brought him a man mute and demon possessed, Matthew 9, verse 32. And then we have the symmetry of Matthew 12, verse 22.

The demon possessed man, this one is not only mute, but also blind, failing to see. And Jesus cures that. And the Pharisees hear of it and say, this fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons.

Jesus knew their thoughts and talks about the kingdom and the house divided against itself that cannot stand. And in verse 27, if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? The answer was by no one. Every commentary I have checked, and I went and checked three more this past week, and everyone says, well, this was an argument because Jewish exorcists were thought to cast out demons by the power of God.

The problem is there are no accounts of such a thing. There's no record that there was any possibility of exorcism or any casting out of demons by anybody until after the time of Christ. And you find it in the book of Acts, and they're doing it in the name of Jesus, by the Jesus that Paul preaches and so on, the seven sons of Sceva.

And this argument is not based on, well, you admit that the power of God is used by your exorcist because there is no such thing. It was unique, and it was one of the signs to Israel. And Jesus points that out.

If I cast out demons with the finger of God, by the power of the Holy Spirit, that means the kingdom has come upon you. And I read a fascinating study. Dr. Alan Ross was one of the professors whose teaching and scholarship I enjoyed at Dallas Theological Seminary.

And I found an article that he wrote on this passage, and he pointed out the fact that there is some scholarship that has been done, both he and Dr. Stanley Toussaint. Dr. Toussaint, I think if I could pick one professor that was my favorite, it would probably be Dr. Toussaint, wonderful, insightful, very practical application type of student of the word of God. And I think it was actually Dr. Toussaint who brought up a study of this word, the kingdom of God has come upon you.

And the idea is you go to Luke where he says the kingdom of God is in you. And people have said, well, the kingdom of God in you is defensible as a translation. But here's the problem.

A, he's talking to faithless, godless, unbelieving, they may not be completely godless, but they're certainly Christless, scribes and Pharisees. And so it's hard to believe that he's saying the kingdom is in you. Secondly, and more importantly, scripture never says that the kingdom enters men.

It always talks about men entering the kingdom. So we go into the kingdom, the kingdom doesn't go into us. So what does it mean the kingdom? And so they say, well, it means it's among you or in your midst.

And that's how we understand it. It makes good sense. But there's been a study done of that particular word used there that is translated among it or has come upon you.

And it has come upon them in the sense that, and this goes all the way back to the days of classical Greek, that something has come within your reach. It's not just near you. It's not just among you, but you can take control of it.

It's, here's a, you think about the financial relief that the government has been offering to people during the virus troubles, the COVID pandemic. And so businesses could apply for a loan based on distress during these times, the loan is available and you can avail yourself of it. If you apply, if you reach out and take it, unlike the individual help that was mailed to pretty much every American taxpayer, this business loan is something that a business applies for and says, yes, send me that.

I need payroll protection program. I need this or whatever. And so it's been made available.

All you have to do is reach out and receive it and take hold of it. That's what the study of this verse means. So if I cast out demons with the spirit of God, the finger of God, that is a sign and nobody had cast out demons before that.

It's kind of a pale sign if other people have been casting out demons. So did the kingdom come when the Jewish exorcists, well, there is no such thing. So, and I guess you'll only hear it here.

Every single commentary I've checked seems to overlook that point, but there I have researched. I have everyone that says that offers no examples of Jewish exorcism prior to the first century when it was done in the name of Christ after the Ascension. So, but this is important because we cannot understand the last half of the chapter without beginning here and looking at this because we have a symmetry.

So after this, he says, I cast out demons by the spirit of God. Surely the kingdom of God has come within your reach, your grasp. You can avail yourself of it.

You can basically enter into it. How can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods? Unless he first binds the strong man, then he will plunder his house. He who is not with me is against me.

And he who does not gather with me scatters abroad. Therefore I say to you, and then we have the unforgivable sin. Once again, in a nutshell, the sin that cannot be forgiven is to reject the witness and testimony of the Holy Spirit.

In these days, it began with the authentication. There are two reasons why signs come and our study this morning is the request for a sign in verse 38. There are two reasons why signs come.

One is to convince. You think about Moses at the burning bush, and he says, I'm not convinced that I'm the right man for your task. This is not to convince to believe so much as convince a believer that he's on the path of God's plan.

All of the signs in didn't convince Pharaoh. But if you are seeking confirmation, Gideon with his fleece, the sign convinces him that Gideon is going to attack. His question is, will you be with us? He's already planning his assault, but will you be with us? If you will be with us, make the ground wet, the fleece wet.

So to convince, and then there is also confirmation. It is a confirmation of things that you already believe. The disciples started following the Lord Jesus at the baptism.

The first ones, Peter and Andrew, John, Philip, but this is a confirmation that they have. So to convince in a time of uncertainty and to confirm that you have in fact chosen. These signs will follow those who believe is a phrase.

It's from a later edition to Mark, but these signs will follow those who believe is a valid notion. So to request a sign when you are not going to be convinced, and when you're not already a believer looking for confirmation, is not going to be honored by God. Those who will receive the sign and be convinced and be confirmed are the ones who will receive it.

Much as the parables are going to explain truth and illustrate truth for people who already believe, but to those who are outside, seeing they see and don't perceive, hearing they hear and don't understand because their heart is calloused over. So the unforgiven sin is to reject the testimony and witness of the Holy Spirit. His testimony is a sign, whatever form it takes.

When he convinces the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment, that's a sign. When he empowers miracles, when he empowers wisdom, when he empowers knowledge, when he empowers the gifts that are distributed among believers in the church, that is your sign. That is your witness.

And to reject that is of course to be an unbeliever and you are headed for destruction in the lake of fire. That sin will not be forgiven either in this age or in the age to come. Notice that there are two arenas of forgiveness.

I didn't talk about this when we covered the passage, but he, Jesus talks about it won't be forgiven in this age and it won't be forgiven in the age to come. The reason we confess our sins and God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins in this age is because we need forgiveness and cleansing in this age. In the age to come, our sins have already

been forgiven because of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But there are temporal and eternal consequences of sin. And there is judgment, both temporal and eternal on sin. And Jesus points out those two arenas here.

We talked about the tree and its fruit being good that Jesus had talked about back in Matthew 7. That's where my Matthew 7 reference came from. A tree is known by its fruit. Good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things.

If you want to bring forth good things, you need a good heart. How do you get a good heart? You can't buy it. You can't cultivate it.

You can't build it. You can't will it. Only God can, as David says, create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

In Psalm 51, only God can cleanse a heart. Only the Lord Jesus can bind the strong and take all of his evil plunder out of the house, carry it off. You don't want the possessions of Satan in the house.

I heard a fascinating story one time when I was a teenager from Bruce Porterfield, a missionary in some of the very darkest areas of intercontinent jungles. He was with the jungle aviation folks. To cut a long story short, there was a missionary that had brought back some interesting carvings from their time among these very isolated people in the depths of the jungle.

They started having awful things happening in and around their home. Bruce Porterfield happened to be visiting with them. They had missions, things in common.

They said, it's inexplicable. We have awful things happening in and around our home. He happened to be over there and saw those carvings.

He said, you have got to get that stuff out of your house. That is associated with demonically inspired ritual and worship in the places where you got those. When they got rid of these terrafemes, if you will, all of that nonsense stopped.

Do not underestimate, even for believers, the influence of demons if you allow their stuff in your house. That includes what comes over your media devices. Demons can affect and affect evil when their paraphernalia is allowed into the home.

I read an interesting article on Ouija boards last week, the history and promotion of those things. Again, if you go seeking that kind of sign, if you are an evil and adulterous generation and you seek that kind of sign, you are liable to get one. It is not a happy thing.

The only way to get a clean heart is for God to create it within us. The fruit of the Spirit comes when the Spirit is active and manifests in our hearts. There is no other way.

There is no legislation, there is no rule, there is no reform, there is no crusade, there is no riot you can put on that is going to create good. Only God creates good. Only God is good.

It is the goodness of God into which we dip and from which we draw that can make us righteous. Good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things. Evil man out of the treasure of his heart brings forth evil things.

If you see evil things, it is coming from evil hearts. The problem is not the things, the problem is the hearts. In the same way that they could not bind the man and his companion that had the legion, you cannot by taking back the country for God or trying to get better laws passed or tighter criminal justice systems, it won't fix the heart.

Even in the millennial kingdom with Jesus and the sons of David ruling for a thousand years, those hearts are eventually going to rise up at the Gog Magog Rebellion when Satan is released. Righteous rule does not create righteous hearts. It has to come from within.

Well, by your words you will be justified and by your words you will be condemned. This is in the middle by your words. Why does he say this at this point? What are the scribes and Pharisees saying? Your good is evil and we are enjoined to not let your good be spoken of as evil, but that's what they're doing.

You're doing the work that you're doing not by the Holy Spirit, but by Satan. Your good is evil. There are people saying that the good things in our country are actually evil and it partakes of this same mindset and these words, not thought out, come from evil hearts and these careless words are going to be judged.

So you don't have to worry about, you know, do they catch everybody that loots and riots and burns? The words they speak, the justification they give for evil is going to be judged. Every careless word. We come to our passage now and let's read it.

Verse 38, Matthew chapter 12. Some of the scribes and Pharisees answered saying, Teacher, we want to see a sign from you. But he answered and said to them, an evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.

For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah. And indeed a greater than Jonah is here.

You notice *is*, is an italics. You have to provide some sort of verb. If it was me, I would use, actually Spanish has a great word, H-A-Y.

Hi. And it means there is. Hay mucho tiempo.

There is a lot of time. Hay mucho frio. There's a lot of cold.

You know, hay mucho desayuno. There's a lot of breakfast, but it means there is. Personally, if I were translating this, I would translate it.

This generation will be condemned by the men of Nineveh because they repented at the preaching of Jonah. And indeed there is a greater than Jonah here, greater than Jonah here. The queen of the south, the queen of Sheba will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon.

And indeed there is a greater than Solomon here. Just shifts the emphasis a little bit. When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest and finds none.

Then he says, I will return to my house from which I came. And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits, more wicked than himself.

They enter and dwell there. And the last state of that man is worse than the first. So shall it also be with this wicked generation.

Verse 39, an evil and adulterous generation seeks a sign. So shall it be with this wicked generation at verse 45. So teacher, we want to see a sign from you.

What just happened? You notice the connecting word at the beginning of verse 38 is then same day, same time. What just happened to prompt all the red ink directly above here? What just happened? You had the mute and blind man that both spoke and saw up in verse 22. Jesus healed him.

The multitudes were amazed and said, could this be the son of David? Why did they say that? They had just seen a sign who can cast out demons, who can heal the congenitally blind and the congenitally mute. And they instantly have not only their tongue loose, but they have vocabulary. They know how to work their lips and their tongue and do all their glottal stops and their labials and their palatials and all the rest of them, palatials, all of the sounds and vowels and consonants instantly able to speak, not only able to see, but able to parse all of the mechanism, all the things that babies take months to learn.

He instantly has, he can judge depth. He can tell the difference between a tree and a man, uh, which is a very interesting distinction. We'll talk about later instantly.

How much of a sign do you need? But they say, show us a sign. Now, well, what are the two purposes for signs to convince and to confirm, right? Are these people going to be

convinced you go over to Luke? I think it's 1721, maybe five. My memory serves where Jesus says, if they don't believe Moses and the prophets, remember, this is the rich man and Lazarus parable.

If they do not believe Moses and the prophets, neither will they believe should one rise from the dead. There is no sign sufficient to convince someone who refuses to be convinced. This is not a genuine desire to see if this is the will of God or having believed in Jesus to see that belief confirmed with a sign.

Is it, this is well do something else. And you'll notice that the careless words that proceed from evil hearts is never satisfied with evidence is never satisfied with facts is never satisfied with data is never. There is no, no matter what you provide, no matter how you counter their challenges, their arguments, their allegations, they're never convinced.

They're never persuaded. It never changes their mind, right? Rarely. So it's an evil and an adulterous generation that refuses to be convinced no matter how persuasive, no matter how factual, no matter how righteous your case is and people who will not be convinced, who will not listen in a balanced way to the arguments of the other side on either side, on any side of an argument.

If you are not willing to consider, evaluate and draw a conclusion in a balanced, reasonable and biblically oriented fashion, you're an evil and an adulterous generation. You are speaking careless words and you're going to be judged. It's just a fact of scripture.

And we want to be as far away from that attitude, that practice, that pattern as we can be. This is when he gets the question, teacher, we want to see a sign from you. They just saw one.

We want a better argument from you. I don't, I don't like that data. I don't like that fact.

I don't like that observation. I don't like that reality. I reject your reality and I substitute my own.

And so show us a sign. The man is standing there talking and seeing. Show us a sign.

It reminds me in the, one of the cathedrals in England, I forget which one, I think it's the great, the great one, is the tomb of Christopher Wren. He was one of the great architects and imaginative designers of a few hundred years ago. He designed that cathedral, Christopher Wren, and he is buried there.

And on his tombstone, there is a legend in Latin that says, Lector Si Montumentum Requirus Circum Specie. Lector means reader. Hey, you, if you're reading this chunk of granite here, Si Montumentum Requirus, if you want a monument to Christopher Wren,

it's just a flat stone and he's buried under it.

And it says, reader, if you want a monument, look around you. Circum Specie. This is it.

This building he designed is his monument. So, Lector, if you want a sign, look at the guy standing here talking and seeing. What's the matter with you? How blind can you be? Seeing they see and do not perceive.

Hearing they hear and do not understand. Point of application. Sometimes we're not sure that God is with us, that he hears our prayers, that he is, in fact, in control, that he's on our side, that his power is available to us, that his plan and purpose is working together for good.

It's time, reader, if you want a sign and evidence, just stop and spend a little time looking around. This is the old count your blessings idea. Look at what God has done.

Look at the fulfilled promises, the faithfulness, the consistency, the ongoing active presence of God in the person of the Holy Spirit, dwelling in fellow believers who are gifted. And if God seems far away, maybe we just need to stop and look at the mute man and the blind man who is no longer mute and no longer blind. And instead of going to God with request for provision and for comfort and for his power to be manifest, to spend more time recognizing that we're asking for something that may already be here.

Sometimes we are asking for the solution to a problem where we are careworn and we're worrisome and we're fraught and we're disheveled and we're stressed and we're strained. And we say, Lord, give me strength. Lord, give me solutions.

Lord, give me relief. And he's already provided it. It's sitting right there in our souls.

And we are asking for something. And before we ask, he has already answered. But are we ignoring the formerly blind and mute man standing right there in our soul? And instead of letting careless words creep into our prayers, circumspecie, look around.

Look at what God has done, what he has done historically, what he has done biblically, what he has done in our own personal lives and the lives of others that we know, and not let ourselves be carried away by a wind. Remember Paul talking about those that are carried about by every wind of doctrine? That's every wind of argument. Someone says, well, where is your God? Where is your faith? It doesn't look like it's doing you much good to be a Christian, to be a believer, to be studying the word of God.

Look at your situation and whether that's an internal voice of our own or demonically initiated or whether it is something from the outside or it's suggested by circumstances. If you need a sign, if you need confirmation, if you need convincing, just look around. The man is standing right here.

They say this right after he heals the man and gives this short discourse talking about, can you not see that only the power of God can bind the strong man? Only the power of God can plunder his house. Only the power of God can remove these demons. And because that is happening, that is a persuasive and convincing sign that the kingdom has come near and is available to be taken.

Well, no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. This is a turning point. This Beelzebub accusation is a turning point and saying that when you see these demons being cast out by the spirit of God, the kingdom has come near.

This is never said again. From this point forward, Jesus never talks about the nearness of the kingdom again. This tears it, this accusation.

And from this point, Jesus says the signs that have been given to you to convince and to persuade and to confirm. If you have not received them by now, none of the rest of it is going to be a sign for you. Now, Jesus is going to do more miracles and he is going to do more persuasive teaching and answer more questions to silence his critics.

But it doesn't serve as a sign anymore. The most powerful things that Jesus did, evidencing the presence of the Holy Spirit of God had been rejected by this crowd and this evil and adulterous crowd. The word generation here is real interesting, isn't it? When Jesus says generation, it implies where they come from.

It's when you call him an evil and adulterous generation. It's kind of like you sons of Belial. We are sons of Abraham.

No, you're sons of your father, the devil. That's where you generated. That's your ancestry, metaphorically speaking.

No sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. And this is a tremendous double entendre. And we need to take a little time to look at it.

So we're going to pause here and take our break. But remember now, when Jesus talks about a sign, he is asked for a sign when he has just provided one. We want to be careful to rise above this level and not be asking God for things that he has already provided to us.

Peace doesn't come by request. Peace is a fruit of the Spirit. And we cultivate the fruit of the Spirit by other means, by soaking our hearts and souls in the word of God, by being confident in our prayer, by reflecting and calling to mind in a Psalm 1 fashion the law of the Lord.

We delight in it and we meditate in it day and night. That makes us the tree planted by the rivers of water, bringing forth our fruit in our season, not what somebody else thinks is fruit in what somebody else thinks is the right time. But things that many believers try

to obtain by request, give us a sign.

It's already there. It's standing there. We just need to remember what the source is.

And we know, we have learned, we've been taught. The Holy Spirit is with us, the word of God is available, and we need to circumspect. Let's pause here and take our break.

When we come back, we're going to look at this sign of Jonah. This is a fascinating, it cuts about three different ways all at once. If there was a three-edged sword, this would be it.

And we'll see it when we come back.