

NOON BIBLE STUDY: MATTHEW 12 (PART 2)

The interactions between Jesus and the religious leaders (specifically the Pharisees) continue in this section of Matthew's gospel. What this highlights is what happens when the real Jesus contradicts certain expectations or desires of those who think they know how it is supposed to be.

Matthew 12:15-21 - Messianic Servant

Jesus' healing ministry and also his practice of withdrawal and obscurity were inspired by the prophetic picture of the Messiah painted by Isaiah. If the common understanding of the role of the Messiah was political or military in nature, the passages in the Old Testament which speak of the Messiah as a suffering servant were important to highlight by the Gospel writers. Here (v. 18-21) Matthew quotes Isaiah 42:1-3.

Q - What is Isaiah describing?

- Servant chosen by, loved by and pleasing to God.
- Empowered by the Spirit of God to proclaim justice to the Gentiles (nations)
- His proclamation will not be quarrelsome, loud or attention getting
- He will be gentle and kind (in contrast to other human rulers who march and crush and bluster)

Q - If you are a believer in the Old Testament promises, why would this be an important passage to read and remember from Matthew.

Because it gives some clarity and understanding to why Jesus lives and served the way he did. He is coming to fulfill all of the Messianic promises, not just the final and flashy ones.

Why did Jesus tell people he healed not to tell anyone?" - This is what is known as the **Messianic Secret**. It seems that Jesus didn't want the news that he was doing what he was doing to get out in many instances. There are few ways that this has been explained:

1 - Jesus wanted the news of him being the Messiah to spread slowly so that people would not try to force him to be King and he could finish what he was sent to do. There was a great longing for the Messiah to come in the region during the time the Romans were ruling Judea. As you know, Jesus was ultimately captured and convicted for claiming to be the Christ/Messiah (Luke 22:66-71; Luke 23:1-3), the longer he can keep this a "secret", and yet at the same time teach people that the Kingdom is coming the better. He wanted to have some control over the way people heard about him and the timing of his arrival in Jerusalem. He eventually will come into Jerusalem during what is called the triumphal entry (on "Palm Sunday" - see Matt. 21, Luke 19, etc) and that's his big reveal - and also what stirs up the most negative attention from the religious leaders too.

2 - Another thought has been that he wanted certain or specific things to show that he was the Messiah, not just the healing he was doing. It's interesting though that the people he healed rarely followed his instruction not to tell people.

Matthew 12:22-29 - Demon-Possessed Man Healed

Jesus heals the man who was possessed by a demon. At this time, the man is also healed of being blind and mute (unable to speak). Though there are some biblical instances of some sicknesses being caused by demons, it's not 100% clear if the demon was causing the man to be blind/mute in this instance.

“This man cannot be the son of David, can he?” - this is another instance of the Messiah they were expecting is in conflict with the Messiah they are experiencing. Seeing Jesus spend his time caring for the weak and tormented in this world seemed like a waste of time when the forces of evil needed conquering.

Yet, ironically, the realities of the very kingdom of God that they are waiting for is on display right in front of them and yet they are missing it! In the age to come, the devil will be destroyed, all infirmities will be healed, and God’s power will fill the earth. In this moment, right before their very eyes, a foretaste of that full reality has been seen.

Rather than rejoicing in this man’s deliverance, the Pharisees accuse Jesus of working by the power of Satan! They specifically mention “Beelzebul” which literally means “master of the house” and thus a name for the figure we called the devil, who would be the ruler of the demons.

Before we think that’s just a wild idea, it’s helpful to know that for the Pharisee there are only two sources of spiritual power - the greatest being from the Creator God, and the other (lesser and evil), from the devil. Because they are dead set on believing that Jesus’ authority and power does not, cannot come from the true God, it must be the power of the devil! Oh the lengths people will go to not have to humbly accept Christ!

Jesus responds by using a little bit of logic. If he is working by the devil’s power, why would his ministry be about confronting and tormenting demons?! This is the context of the line famously quoted by President Lincoln during the civil war. For Jesus to make advances into the areas of this age that are under Satan’s power, he is going to attack (or bind up, cp. 29) Satan. How foolish it is for the Pharisees to say Jesus is working by demonic power when he’s attacking demons!

Jesus **will** defeat the forces of evil and demonic power and in a cataclysmic moment for this one man’s life who was tormented by evil and blind and mute, the devil was defeated that day.

What About Us? What Are Our Expectations?

It was important for the 1st Century Jews to understand that the Messiah first came to heal, serve, teach and redeem (through his death and resurrection). This was important because much of what the Messiah was prophesied to do, specifically reign as conquering king, he did not yet do at his first coming.

I think similarly, it is important for 21st Century Christians to understand that Jesus is coming again to reign as conquering king. This is important because it is easy for many Christians to solely focus on what Jesus did at his 1st coming and not understand and articulate the large quantity of prophecy that will be fulfilled when he returns.

You see, ignoring or minimizing either side of this has the potential to limit our ability to accept and follow Jesus. The Pharisees essentially said “oh, the Messiah would never do _____” and so they missed the Messiah. They essentially said “the Messiah will be like _____ or _____” and then they missed the Messiah.

We know the miracles and love of Jesus, but do we know about his destiny to rule the nations on David’s throne like it is prophesied in the Psalms and Prophets? We know the care that Jesus had for the weak and poor but do we know about the justice that will fill the earth when the Messiah inaugurates the restoration of God’s creation? We know that Jesus died for our sins, and was raised for our victory, but do we also know that Jesus is going to come again to judge and demand allegiance from all of the nations of the earth? We don’t want to limit our understanding to just what is seemingly relevant to us - we want to be believers of and students of the promises and prophecies of God’s word.

This isn’t just true about our understanding of Jesus, but in general we must remain humble to all of the ways that the LORD may work or speak in our lives. Of course we need to be discerning and sharp, but we can’t put up artificial walls of our own making which may prohibit us from believing and experiencing what is true and God’s work in our lives.