

NOON BIBLE STUDY: MATTHEW 12 (PART 4)

Matthew 12:33-37 - Heart & Words & Judgment

“Brood of vipers” - the offspring or children of venomous snakes.

Notice the teaching point here is addressing the words a person speaks is an indication of their heart condition. The words and deeds of Jesus (fruit) are good while the Pharisees are evil.

Even “careless” words are windows into the heart of a person (**v. 36**). It’s tempting to brush off something by saying “*I didn’t mean it...*” but a more honest admission would be “*I didn’t mean for what was really in my heart to come out in my words!*”

God will judge a person based on his standards with the person’s own heart as evidence. For humans, it is harder to see what is in our hearts and so Jesus teaches that the way we can see the heart is by hearing the words we speak. This is much bigger than the occasional four-letter-word. We need to recognize that the condition of our heart is changed through a relationship with God - the one who knows, sees, and transforms the heart of a person.

Matthew 12:38-42 - Signs

Q - Why does Jesus say that an “evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign?”

Jesus rebukes his questioners by essentially saying that two groups of pagan people are closer to salvation than they are! Jesus mentions the residents of Nineveh, the capital city of the Assyrian Empire and the queen of Sheba (Southern Yemen) who both responded to God’s word and sought repentance and wisdom from the LORD. Why does Jesus mention these two?

The Ninevites were a wicked and idolatrous nation who repented when Jonah preached (**Jonah 3**). The Queen of Sheba traveled far to hear the wisdom of God through Solomon and confessed that this wisdom and blessing was from the LORD (**1 Kings 10 & 2 Chronicles 9**). Meanwhile, the people of Jesus’ day who *should have* repented at his preaching and traveled from far and wide to hear and see him were the ones rejecting, rebuking and questioning him.

So, the only sign that this generation would get would be the death and resurrection of Jesus - a sign that would bring both redemption and condemnation for the nation.

This is now the third time Jesus has said he is greater than a major piece or person of the Old Testament story - the temple (**v. 6**), Jonah (**v. 41**) and Solomon (**v. 42**)

Matthew 12:43-45 - Spiritual Housecleaning

Jesus teaches us something about the spiritual realm here in an interestingly timed example. He says that when an evil or unclean spirit leaves a person, it is searching for a place to reside so it may “rest”.

It speaks to the foolishness of a person who is delivered from spiritual oppression, thinking that the removal of evil is all that is required to be holy. In fact, if the heart and life of a person is not filled with God's spirit, the forces of evil will recognize that the place they once resided remains empty and return. But perhaps even more troubling is that the spirits will recognize that their former home is not only vacant but able to house some of their friends.

The Pharisees seemed to have worked hard to avoid evil and not sin - but that isn't the same as living holy. Consider what Paul wrote:

Romans 12:1-2 - Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

We don't just work to not conform to this world, we must be transformed by allowing God's spirit to change our minds and make them new.

The goal isn't just to put things in our lives "in order" and have them looking nice at first glance - the goal is to fill our lives with God, his word, his spirit, his power!

Matthew 12:46-50 - Spiritual Family

v. 46 - mother and brothers - scholars look at this statement by Matthew as a possible indication that Joseph, Jesus' earthly father may have died at this point.

I think some read this passage as if Jesus hears his mom wants to speak with him and he just ignores her and continues teaching. Perhaps - but what is more likely knowing the heart and holiness of Jesus is that he uses this moment of his family asking for him to make a point to his disciples. It's a teachable moment.

Jesus isn't encouraging his disciples to abandon or neglect their biological families. He is using the cultural norm of family-centeredness to contrast that which should be preeminent - his followers' devotion to him and his teachings. In addition, a new familial community takes shape amongst those who follow Jesus which will transcend the normal social and economic connections.

This entire chapter has pointed us in a repeated direction - towards Jesus. Jesus knows and expresses the heart of God. Jesus is greater than their traditions and interpretations. He's greater than the temple, and Jonah and Solomon. He's proving that he's the awaited Messiah and at the same time confounding and surprising their expectations. He's filled with and demonstrating the power of God and yet will ultimately have his death and resurrection be the sign that he is the great prophet. And he's declaring to anyone who will hear what really matters in the end and rebuking in the strongest terms those who are rejecting his message. What really matters in the end isn't keeping sabbath just right, getting a large platform or even being a good son or sibling - it's about listening to and obeying the words he is speaking.