

I. The King is revealed (1-3)
II. The Kingdom is revealed (4-10)
III. The Opposition to the King (11-13)

A. The Antagonism of the Jews (11-12) Narrative

1. Commendation of John in spite of his confusion (11:1-19)
2. Condemnation of the proud because they hear and reject (11:16-24)
3. Comfort to the humble because they hear and receive. (11:25-30)

Matthew 12

4. Confrontation with the Pharisees in Light of their mounting hostility (12:1-45)

a. Concerning Jesus' Authority over the Sabbath (12:1-21)

- The Sabbath issue is a major test of authority and authenticity. Few issues were closer to the heart of Israel's religion.
- In this chapter, Jesus taunts the Pharisees and forces their true colors to show. The essence of the chapter is in verse 30 "He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters."

1) Plucking Grain (12:1-8)

a) The challenge by the Pharisees (12:1-2)

"¹ At that time Jesus went on the Sabbath through the grain fields, and His disciples became hungry and began to pick the heads {of grain} and eat. ² But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, 'Behold, Your disciples do what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath.'

- The Pharisees had equated their oral traditions (which forbade the harvesting of grain on the Sabbath) with the will of God for everyone.
- It is very easy for Christians today to (like the Pharisees) be sensitive to the letter of the law and miss the principle or to substitute traditions (taboos) for the law.

b) The clarification by Jesus (12:3-8)

³ But He said to them, 'Have you not read what David did, when he became hungry, he and his companions; ⁴

how he entered the house of God, and they ate the consecrated bread, which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those with him, but for the priests alone? ⁵ Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath, and are innocent? ⁶ But I say to you, that something greater than the temple is here. ⁷ But if you had known what this means, *'I desire compassion, and not a sacrifice'*, you would not have condemned the innocent. ⁸ For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.'

- Jesus refers to the account in I Sam.21:1-6 where David's men ate from the temple bread which was forbidden in Lev.24:5-9. His second example comes from Num.28:9-10. In both cases the letter of the law was broken because of a higher principle.
- Jesus was claiming that a higher principle was active in the present circumstance. Jesus was declaring himself to have the power to define the meaning of Sabbath as Lord of the Sabbath.
- When Jesus proclaims himself as Lord of the Sabbath, he had to invite severe criticism for he was either a law breaker or Lord and God.
- The Pharisees were convinced that Jesus had to be eliminated because they could not see beyond the traditions which he clearly violated.
- The Sabbath teaching in the epistles becomes a powerful testimony to the change in covenants from Old to New. Of the ten commandments, only the 4th is not reiterated in some form in the epistles.
Rom.14:5 "One man regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind."

2) Healing the withered hand (12:9-14)

a) The challenge by the Pharisees (12:9-10)

⁹ And departing from there, He went into their synagogue. ¹⁰ And behold, {there was} a man with a withered hand. And they questioned Him, saying, 'Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?' -- in order that they might accuse Him.

- There are three kinds of questions - 1) honest inquiry, 2) pedagogical tools, 3) attempts to trick or deflect.

- The Pharisees were not interested in anything but getting rid of Jesus.

b) The clarification by Jesus (12:11-13)

11 And He said to them, ‘What man shall there be among you, who shall have one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not take hold of it, and lift it out? 12 Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep! So then, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.’ 13 Then He said to the man, ‘Stretch out your hand!’ And he stretched it out, and it was restored to normal, like the other.

- The Sabbath respect for rest from work was not to be extended to rest from doing good.
- Note that Jesus did not have to heal on the Sabbath, he could have waited but he healed to make a point. He was taunting the Pharisees at this point.
- Life is full of conflicting moral principles that force us to seek wisdom.

3) The verdict (12:14-21)

a) The Pharisees plan to kill Jesus. (12:14)

14 But the Pharisees went out, and counseled together against Him, {as to} how they might destroy Him.

- The hostility is now solidified.
- Their determination to crucify Jesus is the sin that Jesus speaks of as the “unforgivable sin against the Holy Spirit” later in this chapter.

b) Jesus withdraws and explains. (12:15-21)

15 But Jesus, aware of {this,} withdrew from there. And many followed Him, and He healed them all, 16 and warned them not to make Him known, 17 in order that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, might be fulfilled, saying, 18 *‘Behold, My Servant whom I have chosen; My Beloved in whom My soul is well-pleased; I will put My Spirit upon Him, And He shall proclaim justice to the Gentiles.19 He will not quarrel, nor cry out; Nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets. 20 A*

battered reed He will not break off, And a smoldering wick He will not put out, Until He leads justice to victory. 21 And in His name the Gentiles will hope.'

- Jesus reluctance to be put in the limelight comes from his desire to minister to the “least” and not the “greatest”, (even to the Gentiles) and to do so in a manner that is low key. There is a lesson here for the church in that we too are to take a low profile in the world. The early church set an example.
- Again we see special attention given to the Gentiles.

b. Concerning Jesus’ authority over the satanic (12:22-45)

1) A great sign - exorcism (12:22-30)

a) The Pharisees plan to kill Jesus. (12:22-24)

22 Then there was brought to Him a demon-possessed man {who was} blind and dumb, and He healed him, so that the dumb man spoke and saw. 23 And all the multitudes were amazed, and {began} to say, ‘This {man} cannot be the Son of David, can he?’ 24 But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, ‘This man casts out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons.’

- The multitudes had not made up their minds yet about Jesus while the Pharisees had written him off as demonic (9:34)..

b) Jesus responds with logic. (12:25-30)

25 And knowing their thoughts He said to them, ‘Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste; and any city or house divided against itself shall not stand. 26 And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then shall his kingdom stand? 27 And if I by Beelzebul cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? Consequently they shall be your judges. 28 But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. 29 Or how can anyone enter the strong man’s house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong {man}? And then he will plunder

his house. ³⁰ He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters.

- Jesus uses simple logic to reveal the fact that the rejection of the Pharisees is not rational and has little to do with the evidence.
- Jesus seems to indicate that at this point people had to make a decision. In light of the witness of the Spirit, they had to follow Him or (if not) reject him.
- We should expect the Spirit of God to force the same issue today.

2) The danger of the unforgivable sin (12:31-37)

³¹ Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven men, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven. ³² And whoever shall speak a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age, or in the {age} to come. ³³ Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree bad, and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit. ³⁴ You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. ³⁵ The good man out of {his} good treasure brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of {his} evil treasure brings forth what is evil. ³⁶ And I say to you, that every careless word that men shall speak, they shall render account for it in the day of judgment. ³⁷ For by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned.'

- The blasphemy against the Spirit is:
 - Referring to something that has been said against the Spirit by the Pharisees (vs.24).
 - Unforgivable because it is a rejection of the sources of forgiveness (Jesus as Savior).
 - It is possible that what is in view here is the ministry of the Spirit through the Apostles who explain the meaning of the cross and resurrection of Jesus after Pentecost. In other words, one can reject

the teaching of Jesus but they cannot reject the teaching of the Apostles about the significance of Jesus' death and resurrection in that it is the Gospel.

- There are two other passages that are often linked to this text - Heb.6:4-6, speaks of the impossibility of repentance for those who reject (crucify) Christ. I Jn.5:16 speaks of "a sin unto death" which a believer can commit. It probably refers to discipline through physical death as in I Cor.11:30.
- Jesus indicates that the mouth will reveal the heart. When the Pharisees speak out against Jesus, they are revealing their hearts.
- We are reminded of Paul's words in Rom.10:9 "if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved;"

3) The greatest sign - resurrection (12:38-42)

38 Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered Him, saying, 'Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.' 39 But He answered and said to them, 'An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and {yet} no sign shall be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; 40 for just as *Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster*, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. 41 The men of Nineveh shall stand up with this generation at the judgment, and shall condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. 42 {The} Queen of {the} South shall rise up with this generation at the judgment and shall condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.

- The Jew's request for signs (I Cor.1:22) is granted in the parallel between Jesus and Jonah. Jonah was just 3 days in the fish, so shall the grave only hold Jesus for three days.
- The Gentiles in Nineveh got the point while the Pharisees did not.

4) The danger of unclean spirits returning. (12:43-45)

43 Now when the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places, seeking rest, and does not find {it.} 44 Then it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came'; and when it comes, it finds it unoccupied, swept, and put in order. 45 Then it goes, and takes along with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. That is the way it will also be with this evil generation.'

- The evil generation does not get the point of the exorcism and therefore are vulnerable to a hardening of heart, a state worse than before.
- When the Spirit speaks and we reject, we invite a hardening of the spiritual heart.

5. Invitation to the willing to become God's children (12:46-50)

46 While He was still speaking to the multitudes, behold, His mother and brothers were standing outside, seeking to speak to Him. 47 And someone said to Him, 'Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside seeking to speak to You.' 48 But He answered the one who was telling Him and said, 'Who is My mother and who are My brothers?' 49 And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, 'Behold, My mother and My brothers! 50 For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother.'"

- When Jesus predicted that he would bring a sword and divide natural families (ch.10:34-36) he was not rejecting the family but redefining it along the lines of this text.
- The church should become our true family but too often it is just a club that we visit.
- Doing the will of Jesus' Father equated to following him. This is in keeping with the context of this chapter with its focus of attention, not on the Law of Moses, but the person of Christ.

