

# CHAPTER 12

In this chapter, we have,

- I.** Christ's clearing of the law of the fourth commandment concerning the sabbath-day, and vindicating it from some superstitious notions advanced by the Jewish teachers; showing that works of necessity and mercy are to be done on that day (v. 1-13).
- II.** The prudence, humility, and self-denial of our Lord Jesus in working his miracles (v. 14-21).
- III.** Christ's answer to the blasphemous cavils and calumnies of the scribes and Pharisees, who imputed his casting out devils to a compact with the devil (v. 22-37).
- IV.** Christ's reply to a tempting demand of the scribes and Pharisees, challenging him to show them a sign from heaven (v. 38-45).
- V.** Christ's judgment about his kindred and relations (v. 46-50).

## Ⓜ MATTHEW 12:1-13

### CHRIST VINDICATES HIS DISCIPLES

The Jewish teachers had corrupted many of the commandments, by interpreting them more loosely than they were intended; a mistake which Christ discovered and rectified (Matthew 5) in his sermon on the mount: but concerning the fourth commandment, they had erred in the other extreme, and interpreted it too strictly. Note, it is common for men of corrupt minds, by their zeal in rituals, and the external services of religion, to think to atone for the looseness of their morals. But they are cursed who *add to*, as well as they who *take from, the words of this book*,  
~~626~~ Revelation 22:16, 19; ~~3116~~ Proverbs 30:6.

Now that which our Lord Jesus here lays down is, that the works of necessity and mercy are lawful on the sabbath day, which the Jews in many instances were taught to make a scruple of. Christ's industrious explanation of the fourth commandment, intimates its perpetual obligation

to the religious observation of *one day in seven*, as a *holy sabbath*. He would not expound a law that was immediately to expire, but doubtless intended hereby to settle a point which would be of use to his church in all ages; and so it is to teach us, that our Christian sabbath, though under the direction of the fourth commandment, is not under the injunctions of the Jewish elders.

It is usual to settle the meaning of a law by judgments given upon cases that happen in fact, and in like manner is the meaning of this law settled. Here are two passages of story put together for this purpose, happening at some distance of time from each other, and of a different nature, but both answering this intention.

**I.** Christ, by justifying his disciples in plucking the ears of corn on the sabbath-day, shows that *works of necessity* are *lawful* on that day. Now here observe,

**1.** What it was that the disciples did. They were following their Master one sabbath day through a corn-field; it is likely they were going to the synagogue (v. 9), for it becomes not Christ's disciples to take *idle walks* on that day, and *they were hungry*; let it be no disparagement to our Master's house-keeping. But we will suppose they were so intent upon the sabbath work, that they forgot to eat bread; had spent so much time in their morning worship, that they had no time for their morning meal, but came out fasting, because they would not come late to the synagogue. Providence ordered it that they *went through the corn*, and there they were supplied. Note, God has many ways of bringing suitable provision to his people when they need it, and will take particular care of them when they are going to the synagogue, as of old for them that went up to Jerusalem to worship (<sup>3816</sup>Psalm 84:6, 7), for whose use the rain filled the pools: while we are in the way of duty, *Jehovah-jireh*, let God alone to provide for us. Being in the corn-fields, they began to *pluck the ears of corn*; the law of God allowed this (<sup>6225</sup>Deuteronomy 23:25), to teach people to be neighbourly, and not to insist upon property in a small matter, whereby another may be benefited. This was but slender provision for Christ and his disciples, but it was the best they had, and they were content with it. The famous Mr. Ball, of Whitmore, used to say he had two dishes of meat to his sabbath dinner, a dish of hot milk, and a dish of cold, and he had enough and enough.

2. What was the offence that the Pharisees took at this. It was but a dry breakfast, yet the Pharisees would not let them eat that in quietness. They did not quarrel with them for taking another man's corn (they were no great zealots for justice), but for doing it *on the sabbath day*; for plucking and rubbing the ears of corn of that day was expressly forbidden by the tradition of the elders, for this reason, because it was *a kind of reaping*.

Note, It is no new thing for the most harmless and innocent actions of Christ's disciples to be evil spoken of, and reflected upon as unlawful, especially by those who are zealous for their own inventions and impositions. The Pharisees complained of them to their Master for doing that which it was not *lawful to do*. Note, Those are no friends to Christ and his disciples, who make that to be unlawful which God has not made to be so.

3. What was Christ's answer to this cavil of the Pharisees. The disciples could say little for themselves, especially because those who quarrelled with them seemed to have the strictness of the sabbath sanctification on their side; and it is safest to err on that hand: but Christ came to free his followers, not only from the corruptions of the Pharisees, but from their unscriptural impositions, and therefore has something to say for them, and justifies what they did, though it was a transgression of the canon.

(1.) He justifies them by precedents, which were allowed to be good by the Pharisees themselves.

[1.] He urges an ancient instance of David, who in a case of necessity did that which otherwise he ought not to have done (v. 3, 4); “*Have ye not read the story* (<sup><0216></sup>1 Samuel 21:6) of David's eating the show-bread, which by the law was appropriated to the priest?” (<sup><0215></sup>Leviticus 24:5-9). *It is most holy to Aaron and his sons*; and (<sup><0233></sup>Exodus 29:33) *a stranger shall not eat of it*; yet the priest gave it to David and his men; for though the exception of a case of necessity was not expressed, yet it was implied in that and all other ritual institutions. That which bore out David in eating the show-bread was not his dignity (Uzziah, that invaded the priest's office in the pride of his heart, though a king, was struck with a leprosy for it, <sup><0236></sup>2 Chronicles 26:16, etc.), but his hunger. The greatest shall not have their lusts indulged, but the meanest shall have their wants considered. Hunger is a natural desire which cannot be mortified, but must be gratified, and cannot be put off with any thing but meat; therefore we say, It will *break through stone walls*. Now the *Lord is for the body*, and allowed his own

appointment to be dispensed with in a case of distress; much more might the tradition of the elders be dispensed with. Note, That may be done in a case of necessity which may not be done at another time; there are laws which necessity has not, but it is a law to itself. *Men do not despise, but pity, a thief that steals to satisfy his soul when he is hungry,* <sup>416b</sup>Proverbs 6:30.

[2.] He urges a daily instance of the priests, which they likewise *read in the law*, and according to which was the constant usage, v. 5. *The priests in the temple* did a great deal of servile work on the sabbath day; killing, flaying, burning the sacrificed beasts, which in a common case would *have been profaning the sabbath*; and yet it was never reckoned any transgression of the fourth commandment, because the temple-service required and justified it. This intimates, that those labours are lawful on the sabbath day which are necessary, not only to the *support of life*, but to the *service of the day*; as tolling a bell to call the congregation together, travelling to church, and the like. Sabbath rest is to promote, not to hinder, sabbath worship.

(2.) He justifies them by arguments, three cogent ones.

[1.] *In this place is one greater than the temple*, v. 6. If the temple-service would justify what the priests did in their ministrations, the service of Christ would much more justify the disciples in what they did in their attendance upon him. The Jews had an extreme veneration for the temple: it *sanctified the gold*; Stephen was accused for *blaspheming that holy place* (<sup>416b</sup>Acts 6:13); but Christ, in a corn-field, was *greater than the temple*, for in him dwelt not the *presence of God* symbolically, but *all the fulness of the Godhead bodily*. Note, If whatever we do, we do it *in the name of Christ*, and *as unto him*, it shall be graciously accepted of God, however it may be censured and cavilled at by men.

[2.] *God will have mercy and not sacrifice*, v. 7. Ceremonial duties must give way to moral, and the natural, royal law of love and self-preservation must take place of ritual observances. This is quoted from <sup>306</sup>Hosea 6:6. It was used before, <sup>409b</sup>Matthew 9:13, in vindication of mercy to the souls of men; here, of mercy to their bodies. The rest of the sabbath was ordained for man's good, in favour of the body, Deuteronomy v. 14. 5:14. Now no law must be construed so as to contradict its own end. *If you had known what this means*, had known what it is to be of a merciful disposition, you would have been sorry that they were forced to do this to satisfy their

hunger, and would *not have condemned the guiltless*. Note, *First*, Ignorance is the cause of our rash and uncharitable censures of our brethren. *Secondly*, It is not enough for us to know the scriptures, but we must labour to *know the meaning* of them. *Let him that readeth understand*. *Thirdly*, Ignorance of the meaning of the scripture is especially shameful in those who take upon them to teach others.

[3.] *The Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day*, v. 8. That law, as all the rest, is put into the hand of Christ, to be altered, enforced, or dispensed with, as he sees good. It was by *the Son* that God *made the world*, and by him he instituted the sabbath in innocency; by him he gave the ten commandments at mount Sinai, and as Mediator he is entrusted with the institution of ordinances, and to make what changes he thought fit; and particularly, as being *Lord of the sabbath*, he was authorized to make such an alteration of that day, as that it should become the Lord's day, the Lord Christ's day. And if Christ be the *Lord of the sabbath*, it is fit the day and all the work of it should be dedicated to him. By virtue of this power Christ here enacts, that works of necessity, if they be really such, and not a pretended and self-created necessity, are lawful on the sabbath day; and this explication of the law plainly shows that it was to be perpetual. *Exceptio firmat regulam — The exception confirms the rule.*

Christ having thus silenced the Pharisees, and got clear of them (v. 9), *departed*, and *went into their synagogue*, the synagogue of these Pharisees, in which they presided, and toward which he was going, when they picked this quarrel with him. Note, *First*, We must take heed lest any thing that occurs in our way to holy ordinances unfit us for, or divert us from, our due attendance on them. Let us proceed in the way of our duty, notwithstanding the artifices of Satan, who endeavours, by the *perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds*, and many other ways, to ruffle and discompose us. *Secondly*, We must not, for the sake of private feuds and personal piques, draw back from public worship. Though the Pharisees had thus maliciously cavilled at Christ, yet he *went into their synagogue*. Satan gains this point, if, by sowing discord among brethren, he prevail to drive them, or any of them, from the synagogue, and the communion of the faithful.

**II.** Christ, by *healing the man that had the withered hand on the sabbath day*, shows that works of mercy are lawful and proper to be done on that day. The work of necessity was done by the disciples, and justified by him;

the work of mercy was done by himself; the works of mercy were his works of necessity; it was his *meat and drink to do good. I must preach*, says he, <sup>4048</sup> Luke 4:43. This cure is recorded for the sake of the time when it was wrought, on the sabbath.

Here is,

**1.** The affliction that this poor man was in; his hand was withered so that he was utterly disabled to get his living by *working with his hands*. St. Jerome says, that the gospel of Matthew in Hebrew, used by the Nazarenes and Ebionites, adds this circumstance to this story of the man with the withered hand, that he was *Caementarius* — *a bricklayer*, and applied himself to Christ thus; “Lord, I am a bricklayer, and *have got my living by my labour (manibus victum quaeritans)*; I beseech thee, O Jesus, restore me the use of my hand, *that I may not be obliged to beg my bread*” (*ne turpiter mendicem cibos*). Hieron. *in loc*. This poor man was in the synagogue. Note, Those who can do but little, or have but little to do for the world, must do so much the more for their souls; as the rich, the aged, and the infirm.

**2.** A spiteful question which the Pharisees put to Christ upon the sight of this man. *They asked him, saying, Is it lawful to heal?* We read not here of any address this poor man made to Christ for a cure, but they observed Christ began to take notice of him, and knew it was usual for him to be *found of those that sought him not*, and therefore with their badness they anticipated his goodness, and started this case as a stumbling-block in the way of doing good; *Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath-day?* Whether it was lawful for *physicians to heal* on that day or not, which was the thing disputed in their books, one would think it past dispute, that it is lawful for *prophets to heal*, for him to heal who discovered a divine power and goodness in all he did of this kind, and manifested himself to be *sent of God*. Did ever any ask, whether it is lawful for God to heal, to send his word and heal? It is true, Christ was now *made under the law*, by a voluntary submission to it, but he was never made under the precepts of the elders. *Is it lawful to heal?* To enquire into the lawfulness and unlawfulness of actions is very good, and we cannot apply ourselves to any with such enquiries more fitly than to Christ; but they asked here, not that they might be instructed by him, but *that they might accuse him*. If he should say that it was lawful to heal on the sabbath day, they would accuse him of a contradiction to the fourth commandment; to so great a degree of

superstition had the Pharisees brought the sabbath rest, that, unless in peril of life, they allowed not any medicinal operations on the sabbath day. If he should say that it was not lawful, they would accuse him of partiality, having lately justified his disciples in plucking the ears of corn on that day.

**3.** Christ's answer to this question, by way of appeal to themselves, and their own opinion and practice, v. 11, 12. In case a *sheep* (though but one, of which the loss would not be very great) should fall into a pit on the sabbath day, *would they not lift it out?* No doubt they might do it, the fourth commandment allows it; they must do it, for a *merciful man regardeth the life of his beast*, and for their parts they would do it, rather than lose a sheep; does Christ take care for sheep? Yes, he does; he preserves and provides for both man and beast. But here he says it for our sakes (~~1~~ 1 Corinthians 9:9, 10), and hence argues, *How much then is a man better than a sheep?* Sheep are not only harmless but useful creatures, and are prized and tended accordingly; yet a man is here preferred far before them. Note, Man, in respect of his being, is a great deal better, and more valuable, than the best of the brute creatures: man is a reasonable creature, capable of knowing, loving, and glorifying God, and therefore is better than a sheep. The sacrifice of a sheep could therefore not atone for the sin of a soul. They do not consider this, who are more solicitous for the education, preservation, and supply of their horses and dogs than of God's poor, or perhaps their own household.

Hence Christ infers a truth, which, even at first sight, appears very reasonable and good-natured; that *it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days*; they had asked, *Is it lawful to heal?* Christ proves it is lawful to *do well*, and let any one judge whether healing, as Christ healed, was not *doing well*. Note, There are more ways of *doing well* upon sabbath days, than by the duties of God's immediate worship; attending the sick, relieving the poor, helping those who are fallen into sudden distress, and call for speedy relief; this is *doing good*: and this must be done from a principle of love and charity, with humility and self-denial, and a heavenly frame of spirit, and this is *doing well*, and it *shall be accepted*, ~~1~~ Genesis 4:7.

**4.** Christ's curing of the man, notwithstanding the offence which he foresaw the Pharisees would take at it, v. 13. Though they could not answer Christ's arguments, they were resolved to persist in their prejudice

and enmity; but Christ went on with his work notwithstanding. Note, Duty is not to be left undone, nor opportunities of doing good neglected, for fear of giving offence. Now the manner of the cure is observable; he said to the man, “*Stretch forth thy hand, exert thyself as well as thou canst;*” and he did so, *and it was restored whole*. This, as other cures Christ wrought, had a spiritual significancy.

(1.) By nature our hands are withered, we are utterly unable of ourselves to doing any thing that is good.

(2.) It is Christ only, by the power of his grace, that cures us; he heals the withered hand by putting life into the dead soul, works in us both to will and to do.

(3.) In order to our cure, he commands us to *stretch forth our hands*, to improve our natural powers, and do as well as we can; to stretch them out in prayer to God, to stretch them out to lay hold on Christ by faith, to stretch them out in holy endeavours. Now this man could not stretch forth his withered hand of himself, any more than the impotent man could arise and carry his bed, or Lazarus come forth out of his grave; yet Christ bid him do it. God's commands to us to do the duty which of ourselves we are not able to do are no more absurd or unjust, than this command to the man with the withered hand, *to stretch it forth*; for with the command, there is a promise of grace which is given by the word. *Turn ye at my reproof, and I will pour out my Spirit,* <sup>4023</sup>Proverbs 1:23. Those who perish are as inexcusable as this man would have been, if he had not attempted to stretch forth his hand, and so had not been healed. But those who are saved have no more to boast of than this man had of contributing to his own cure, by stretching forth his hand, but are as much indebted to the power and grace of Christ as he was.

## ~~4024~~ MATTHEW 12:14-21

### CHRIST WITHDRAWS HIMSELF

As in the midst of Christ's greatest humiliations, there were proofs of his dignity, so in the midst of his greatest honours, he gave proofs of his humility; and when the mighty works he did gave him an opportunity of



making a figure, yet he made it appear that *he emptied himself*, and *made himself of no reputation*. Here we have,

**I.** The cursed malice of the Pharisees against Christ (v. 14); being enraged at the convincing evidence of his miracles, they *went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him*. That which vexed them was, not only that by his miracles his honour eclipsed theirs, but that the doctrine he preached was directly opposite to their pride, and hypocrisy, and worldly interest; but they pretended to be displeased at his breaking the sabbath day, which was by the law a capital crime, <sup><138></sup>Exodus 35:2. Note, it is no new thing to see the vilest practices cloaked with the most specious pretences. Observe their policy; they took counsel about it, considered with themselves which way to do it effectually; they took counsel together in a close cabal about it, that they might both animate and assist one another. Observe their cruelty; they took counsel, not to imprison or banish him, but to destroy him, to be the death of him who came *that we might have life*. What an indignity was hereby put upon our Lord Jesus, to run him down as an outlaw (*qui caput gerit lupinum — carries a wolf's head*), and the plague of his country, who was the greatest blessing of it, the Glory of his people Israel!

**II.** Christ's absconding upon this occasion, and the privacy he chose, to decline, not his work, but his danger; because *his hour was not yet come* (v. 15), *he withdrew himself from thence*. He could have secured himself by miracle, but chose to do it in the ordinary way of flight and retirement; because in this, as in other things, he would submit to the sinless infirmities of our nature. Herein he humbled himself, that he was driven to the common shift of those who are most helpless; thus also he would give an example to his own rule, *When they persecute you in one city, flee to another*. Christ had said and done enough to convince those Pharisees, if reason or miracles would have done it; but instead of yielding to the conviction, they were hardened and enraged, and therefore he left them as incurable, <sup><259></sup>Jeremiah 51:9.

Christ did not retire for his own ease, nor seek an excuse to leave off his work; no, his retirements were filled up with business, and he was even then doing good, when he was forced to flee for the same. Thus he gave an example to his ministers, to do what they can, when they cannot do what they would, and to continue teaching, even when they are removed into corners. When the Pharisees, the great dons and doctors of the nation,

drove Christ from then, and forced him to withdraw himself, yet the common people crowded after him; *great multitudes followed him* and found him out. This some would turn to his reproach, and call him the ring-leader of the mob; but it was really his honour, that all who were unbiased and unprejudiced, and not blinded by the pomp of the world, were so hearty, so zealous for him, that they would follow him whithersoever he went, and whatever hazards they ran with him; as it was also the honour of his grace, that the poor were evangelized; that when they received him, he received them and healed them all. Christ came into the world to be a Physician-general, as the sun to the lower world, *with healing under his wings*. Though the Pharisees persecuted Christ for doing good, yet he went on in it, and did not let the people fare the worse for the wickedness of their rulers. Note, Though some are unkind to us, we must not on that account be unkind to others.

Christ studied to reconcile usefulness and privacy; he *healed them all*, and yet (v. 16), *charged them that they should not make him known*; which may be looked upon,

**1.** As an act of prudence; it was not so much the miracles themselves, as the public discourse concerning them, that enraged the Pharisees (v. 23, 24); therefore Christ, though he would not omit doing good, yet would do it with as little noise as possible, to avoid offence to them and peril to himself. Note, Wise and good men, though they covet to do good, yet are far from coveting to have it talked of when it is done; because it is God's acceptance, not men's applause, that they aim at. And in suffering times, though we must boldly go on in the way of duty, yet we must contrive the circumstances of it so as not to exasperate, more than is necessary, those who seek occasion against us; *Be ye wise as serpents*, ~~406~~ Matthew 10:16.

**2.** It may be looked upon as an act of righteous judgment upon the Pharisees, who were unworthy to hear of any more of his miracles, having made so light of those they had seen. By shutting their eyes against the light, they had forfeited the benefit of it.

**3.** As an act of humility and self-denial. Though Christ's intention in his miracles was to prove himself the Messiah, and so to bring men to believe on him, in order to which it was requisite that they should be known, yet sometimes he charged the people to conceal them, to set us an example of humility, and to teach us not to proclaim our own goodness or usefulness,

or to desire to have it proclaimed. Christ would have his disciples to be the reverse of those who did all their works *to be seen of men*.

**III.** The fulfilling of the scriptures in all this, v. 17. Christ retired into privacy and obscurity, that though he was eclipsed, the word of God might be fulfilled, and so illustrated and glorified, which was the thing his heart was upon. The scripture here said to be fulfilled is <sup><2301></sup>Isaiah 42:1-4, which is quoted at large, v. 18-21. The scope of it is to show how mild and quiet, and yet how successful, our Lord Jesus should be in his undertaking; instances of both which we have in the foregoing passages. observe here,

**1.** The pleasure of the Father in Christ (v. 18); *Behold, my Servant whom I have chosen, my Beloved in whom my soul is well pleased*. Hence we may learn,

**(1.)** That our Saviour was God's Servant in the great work of our redemption. He therein submitted himself to the Father's will (<sup><3102></sup>Hebrews 10:7), and set himself to serve the design of his grace and the interests of his glory, in repairing the breaches that had been made by man's apostasy. As a *Servant*, he had a great work appointed him, and a great trust reposed in him. This was a part of his humiliation, that though he *thought it not robbery to be equal with God*, yet that in the work of our salvation he took upon him the form of a servant, received a law, and came into bonds. *Though he were a son, yet learned he this obedience*, <sup><3103></sup>Hebrews 5:8. The motto of this Prince is, *Ich dien — I serve*.

**(2.)** That Jesus Christ was chosen of God, as the only fit and proper person for the management of the great work of our redemption. He is *my Servant whom I have chosen*, as *par negotio — equal to the undertaking*. None but he was able to do the Redeemer's work, or fit to wear the Redeemer's crown. He was *one chosen out of the people* (<sup><3104></sup>Psalms 89:19), chosen by Infinite Wisdom to that post of service and honour, for which neither man nor angel was qualified; none but Christ, that he might in all things have the pre-eminence. Christ did not thrust himself upon this work, but was duly chosen into it; Christ was so God's Chosen as to be the head of election, and of all other the Elect, for we are *chosen in him*, <sup><4104></sup>Ephesians 1:4.

**(3.)** That Jesus Christ is God's Beloved, his beloved Son; as God, he lay from eternity in his bosom (<sup><4105></sup>John 1:18); he was *daily his delight*, (<sup><4106></sup>Proverbs 8:30). Between the Father and the Son there was before all

time an eternal and inconceivable intercourse and interchanging of love, and thus *the Lord possessed him in the beginning of his way*, <sup><3082></sup>Proverbs 8:22. As Mediator, the Father loved him; then when it pleased the Lord to bruise him, and he submitted to it, *therefore did the Father love him*, <sup><3017></sup>John 10:17.

(4.) That Jesus Christ is one in whom the Father is well pleased, in whom his soul is pleased; which denotes the highest complacency imaginable. God declared, by a voice from heaven, that he was his beloved Son in whom he is well pleased; well pleased *in him*, because he was the ready and cheerful Undertaker of that work of wonder which God's heart was so much upon, and he is well pleased with us in him; for he had *made us accepted in the Beloved*, <sup><3016></sup>Ephesians 1:6. All the interest which fallen man has or can have in God is grounded upon and owing to God's *well-pleasèdness* in Jesus Christ; for there is *no coming to the Father but by him*, <sup><3046></sup>John 14:6.

2. The promise of the Father to him in two things.

(1.) That he should be every way well qualified for his undertaking; *I will put my Spirit upon him*, as a Spirit of *wisdom and counsel*, <sup><3012></sup>Isaiah 11:2, 3. Those whom God calls to any service, he will be sure to fit and qualify for it; and by that it will appear that he called them to it, as Moses, <sup><3042></sup>Exodus 4:12. Christ, as God, was equal in power and glory with the Father; as Mediator, he received from the Father power and glory, and received that he might give: and all that the Father gave him, to qualify him for his undertaking, was summed up in this, he *put his Spirit upon him*: this was that *oil of gladness* with which he was *anointed above his fellows*, <sup><3009></sup>Hebrews 1:9. He received the Spirit, not by measure, but *without measure*, <sup><3034></sup>John 3:34. Note, Whoever they be that God has chosen, and in whom he is well pleased, he will be sure to *put his Spirit upon them*. Wherever he confers his love, he confers somewhat of his likeness.

(2.) That he should be abundantly successful in his understanding. Those whom God sends he will certainly own. It was long since secured by promise to our Lord Jesus, that the *good pleasure of the Lord should prosper in his hand*, <sup><2510></sup>Isaiah 53:10. And here we have an account of that prospering good pleasure.

[1.] He shall *show judgment to the Gentiles*. Christ in his own person preached to those who bordered upon the heathen nations (see <sup><4185></sup>Mark 3:6-8), and by his apostle showed his gospel, called here his *judgment*, to the Gentile world. The way and method of salvation, the *judgment* which is *committed to the Son*, is not only wrought out by him as our great High Priest, but showed and published by him as our great Prophet. The gospel, as it is a rule of practice and conversation, which has a direct tendency to the reforming and bettering of men's hearts and lives, shall be showed to the Gentiles. God's judgments had been the Jews' peculiar (<sup><4179></sup>Psalms 147:19), but it was often foretold, by the Old-Testament prophets, that they should be *showed to the Gentiles*, which therefore ought not to have been such a surprise as it was to the unbelieving Jews, much less a vexation.

[2.] *In his name shall the Gentiles trust*, v. 21. He shall so show judgment to them, that they shall heed and observe what he shows them, and be influenced by it to depend upon him, to devote themselves to him, and conform to that judgment. Note, The great design of the gospel, is to bring people to trust in the name of Jesus Christ; his name Jesus, a Saviour, that precious name whereby he is called, and which is as ointment poured forth; *The Lord our Righteousness*. The evangelist here follows the Septuagint (or perhaps the latter editions of the Septuagint follow the evangelist); the Hebrew (<sup><3404></sup>Isaiah 42:4) is, *The isles shall wait for his law*. The isles of the Gentiles are spoken of (<sup><4005></sup>Genesis 10:5), as peopled by the sons of Japhet, of whom it was said (<sup><4007></sup>Genesis 9:27), *God shall persuade Japhet to dwell in the tents of Shem*; which was now to be fulfilled, when *the isles* (says the prophet), *the Gentiles* (says the evangelist), *shall wait for his law*, and *trust in his name*: compare these together, and observe, that they, and they only, can with confidence *trust in Christ's name*, that *wait for his law* with a resolution to be ruled by it. Observe also, that the law we wait for is the law of faith, the law of trusting in his name. This is now his great commandment, that we *believe in Christ*, <sup><4183></sup>1 John 3:23.

**3.** The prediction concerning him, and his mild and quiet management of his undertaking, v. 19, 20. It is chiefly for the sake of this that it is here quoted, upon occasion of Christ's affected privacy and concealment.

(1.) That he should carry on his undertaking without noise or ostentation. *He shall not strive, or make an outcry*. Christ and his kingdom *come not*

with observation, <sup>272</sup>Luke 17:20, 21. When the First-begotten was brought into the world, it was not with state and ceremony; he made no public entry, had no harbingers to proclaim him King. He *was in the world and the world knew him not*. Those were mistaken who fed themselves with hopes of a pompous Saviour. *His voice was not heard in the streets*; “Lo, here is Christ;” or, “Lo, he is there:” he spake in a still small voice, which was alluring to all, but terrifying to none; he did not affect to make a noise, but came down silently like the dew. What he spake and did was with the greatest possible humility and self-denial. His kingdom was spiritual, and therefore not to be advanced by force or violence, or by high pretensions. No, *the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power*.

(2.) That he should carry on his undertaking without severity and rigour (v. 20). *A bruised reed shall he not break*. Some understand this of his patience in bearing with the wicked; he could as easily have broken these Pharisees as a bruised reed, and have quenched them as soon as smoking flax; but he will not do it till the judgment-day, when all his enemies shall be made his footstool. Others rather understand it of his power and grace in bearing up the weak. In general, the design of his gospel is to establish such a method of salvation as encourages sincerity, though there be much infirmity; it does not insist upon a sinless obedience, but accepts an upright, willing mind. As to particular persons, that follow Christ in meekness, and in fear, and in much trembling, observe,

[1.] How their case is here described — they are like *a bruised reed, and smoking flax*. Young beginners in religion are weak as a bruised reed, and their weakness offensive like smoking flax; some little life they have, but it is like that of a bruised reed; some little heat, but like that of smoking flax. Christ's disciples were as yet but weak, and many are so that have a place in his family. The grace and goodness in them are as a bruised reed, the corruption and badness in them are as smoking flax, as the wick of a candle when it is put out and is yet smoking.

[2.] What is the compassion of our Lord Jesus toward them? He will not discourage them, much less reject them or cast them off; the reed that is bruised shall not be broken and trodden down, but shall be supported, and made as strong as a cedar or flourishing palm-tree. The candle newly lighted, though it only smokes and does not flame, shall not be blown out, but blown up. The *day of small things* is the day of *precious things*, and therefore he will not despise it, but make it *the day of great things*,

<300>Zechariah 4:10. Note, Our Lord Jesus deals very tenderly with those who have true grace, though they be weak in it, <200>Isaiah 40:11; <300>Hebrews 5:2. He remembers not only that we are dust, but that we are flesh.

[3.] The good issue and success of this, intimated in that, *till he send forth judgment unto victory*. That judgment which he showed to the Gentiles shall be victorious, he will go on conquering and to conquer, <400>Revelation 6:2. Both the preaching of the gospel in the world, and the power of the gospel in the heart, shall prevail. Grace shall get the upper hand of corruption, and shall at length be perfected in glory. Christ's judgment will be brought forth to victory, for when he judges he will overcome. He shall *bring forth judgment unto truth*; so it is, <200>Isaiah 42:3. Truth and victory are much the same, for *great is the truth, and will prevail*.

## <400>MATTHEW 12:22-37

### THE SIN AGAINST THE HOLY GHOST

In these verses we have,

**I.** Christ's glorious conquest of Satan, in the gracious cure of one who, by the divine permission, was under his power, and in his possession, v. 22. Here observe,


**1.** The man's case was very sad; he was *possessed with a devil*. More cases of this kind occurred in Christ's time than usual, that Christ's power might be the more magnified, and his purpose the more manifested, in opposing and dispossessing Satan; and that it might the more evidently appear, that he *came to destroy the works of the devil*. This poor man that was possessed was blind and dumb; a miserable case! he could neither see to help himself, nor speak to others to help him. A soul under Satan's power, and led captive by him, is blind in the things of God, and dumb at the throne of grace; sees nothing, and says nothing to the purpose. Satan blinds the eye of faith, and seals up the lips of prayer.

**2.** His cure was very strange, and the more so, because sudden; *he healed him*. Note, The conquering and dispossessing of Satan is the healing of

souls. And the cause being removed, immediately the effect ceased; the *blind and dumb both spake and saw*. Note, Christ's mercy is directly opposite to Satan's malice; his favours, to the devil's mischiefs. When Satan's power is broken in the soul, the eyes are opened to see God's glory, and the lips opened to speak his praise.

**II.** The conviction which this gave to the people to *all the people*: they *were amazed*. Christ had wrought divers miracles of this kind before; but his works are not the less wonderful, nor the less to be wondered at, for their being often repeated. They inferred from it, "*Is not this the Son of David? The Messiah promised, that was to spring from the loins of David? Is not this he that should come?*" We may take this,

**1.** As an *enquiring* question; they asked, *Is not this the Son of David?* But they did not stay for an answer: the impressions were cogent, but they were transient. It was a good question that they started; but, it should seem, it was soon lost, and was not prosecuted. Such convictions as these should be brought to a head, and then they are likely to be brought to the heart. Or,

**2.** as an *affirming* question; *Is not this the Son of David?* "Yes, certainly it is, it can be no other; such miracles as these plainly evince that the kingdom of the Messiah is now setting up." And they were the people, the vulgar sort of the spectators, that drew this inference from Christ's miracles. Atheists will say, "That was because they were less prying than the Pharisees;" no, the matter of fact was obvious, and required not much search: but it was because they were less prejudiced and biassed by worldly interest. So plain and easy was the way made to this great truth of Christ being the Messiah and Saviour of the world, that the common people could not miss it; the *wayfaring men, though fools, could not err therein*. See  Isaiah 35:8. It was found of them that sought it. It is an instance of the condescensions of divine grace, that the things that were *hid from the wise and prudent were revealed unto babes*. The world by wisdom knew not God, and by the foolish things the wise were confounded.

**III.** The blasphemous cavil of the Pharisees, v. 24. The Pharisees were a sort of men that pretended to more knowledge in, and zeal for, the divine law, than other people; yet they were the most inveterate enemies to Christ and his doctrine. They were proud of the reputation they had among the



people; *that* fed their pride, supported their power, and filled their purses; and when they heard the people say, *Is not this the Son of David?* they were extremely irritated, more at that than at the miracle itself; this made them jealous of our Lord Jesus, and apprehensive, that as *his* interest in the people's esteem increased, *theirs* must of course be eclipsed and diminished; therefore they envied him, as Saul did his father David, because of what the women sang of him, ~~OR~~ 1 Samuel 18:7, 8. Note, Those who bind up their happiness in the praise and applause of men, expose themselves to a perpetual uneasiness upon every favourable word that they hear said of any other. The shadow of honour followed Christ, who fled from it, and fled from the Pharisees, who were eager in the pursuit of it. They said, "*This fellow does not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils, and therefore is not the Son of David.*" Observe,

**1.** How scornfully they speak of Christ, *this fellow*; as if that precious name of his, which is *as ointment poured forth*, were not worthy to be taken into their lips. It is an instance of their pride and superciliousness, and their diabolical envy, that the more people magnified Christ, the more industrious they were to vilify him. It is a bad thing to speak of good men with disdain because they are poor.

**2.** How blasphemously they speak of his miracles; they could not deny the matter of fact; it was as plain as the sun, that devils were cast out by the word of Christ; nor could they deny that it was an extraordinary thing, and supernatural. Being thus forced to grant the premises, they had no other way to avoid the conclusion, that *this is the Son of David*, than by suggesting that *Christ cast out devils by Beelzebub*; that there was a compact between Christ and the devil; pursuant to that, the devil was not cast out, but did voluntarily retire, and give back by consent and with design: or as if, by an agreement with the ruling devil, he had power to cast out the inferior devils. No surmise could be more palpably false and vile than this; that he, who is Truth itself, should be in combination with the father of lies, to cheat the world. This was the last refuge, or subterfuge rather, or an obstinate infidelity, that was resolved to stand it out against the clearest conviction. Observe, Among the devils there is a prince, the ringleader of the apostasy from God and rebellion against him; but this prince is Beelzebub — the god of a fly, or a dunghill god. How art thou fallen, O Lucifer! from an anger of light, to be a lord of flies! Yet this is the prince of the devils too, the chief of the gang of infernal spirits.

**IV.** Christ's reply to this base insinuation, v. 25-30. *Jesus knew their thoughts.* Note, Jesus Christ knows what we are thinking at any time, knows what is in man; he *understands our thoughts afar off.* It should seem that the Pharisees could not for shame speak it out, but kept it in their minds; they could not expect to satisfy the people with it; they therefore reserved it for the silencing of the convictions of their own consciences. Note, Many are kept off from their duty by that which they are ashamed to own, but which they cannot hide from Jesus Christ: yet it is probable that the Pharisees had whispered what they thought among themselves, to help to harden one another; but Christ's reply is said to be to their thoughts, because he knew with what mind, and from what principle, they said it; that they did not say it in their haste, but that it was the product of a rooted malignity.

Christ's reply to this imputation is copious and cogent, that *every mouth may be stopped* with sense and reason, before it be stopped with fire and brimstone. Here are three arguments by which he demonstrates the unreasonableness of this suggestion.

**1.** It would be very strange, and highly improbably, that Satan should be cast out by such a compact, because then Satan's *kingdom would be divided against itself*; which, considering his subtlety, is not a thing to be imagined, v. 25, 26.

**(1.)** Here is a known rule laid down, that in all societies a common ruin is the consequence of mutual quarrels: *Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation*; and every family too: *Quae enim domus tam stabilis est, quae tam firma civitas, quae non odiis atque dissidiis funditus everti possit? — For what family is so strong, what community so firm, as not to be overturned by enmity and dissension?* Cic. *Lael.* 7. Divisions commonly end in desolations; if we clash, we break; if we divide one from another, we become an easy prey to a common enemy; much more *if we bite and devour one another, shall we be consumed one of another,* <sup><RNS</sup> Galatians 5:15. Churches and nations have known this by sad experience.

**(2.)** The application of it to the case in hand (v. 26), *If Satan cast out Satan*; if the prince of the devils should be at variance with the inferior devils, the whole kingdom and interest would soon be broken; nay, if Satan should come into a compact with Christ, it must be to his own ruin;

for the manifest design and tendency of Christ's preaching and miracles was to overthrow the kingdom of Satan, as a kingdom of darkness, wickedness, and enmity to God; and to set up, upon the ruins of it, a kingdom of light, holiness, and love. *The works of the devil*, as a rebel against God, and a tyrant over the souls of men, were destroyed by Christ; and therefore it was the most absurd thing imaginable, to think that Beelzebub should at all countenance such a design, or come into it: if he should fall in with Christ, *how should then his kingdom stand?* He would himself contribute to the overthrow of it. Note, The devil has a kingdom, a common interest, in opposition to God and Christ, which, to the utmost of his power, he will make to stand, and he will never come into Christ's interests; he must be conquered and broken by Christ, and therefore cannot submit and bend to him. *What concord or communion can there be between light and darkness, Christ and Belial, Christ and Beelzebub?* Christ will destroy the devil's kingdom, but he needs not do it by any such little arts and projects as that of a secret compact with Beelzebub; no, this victory must be obtained by nobler methods. Let the prince of the devils muster up all his forces, let him make use of all his powers and politics, and keep his interests in the closest confederacy, yet Christ will be too hard for his united force, and his kingdom shall not stand.

**2.** It was not at all strange, or improbable, that devils should be cast out by the Spirit of God; for,

**(1.)** *How otherwise do your children cast them out?* There were those among the Jews who, by invocation of the name of the most high God, or the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, did sometimes cast out devils. Josephus speaks of some in his time that did it; we read of *Jewish exorcists* (<sup>419B</sup> Acts 19:13), and of some that *in Christ's name cast out devils*, though they did not follow him (<sup>419B</sup> Mark 9:38), or were not faithful to him, (<sup>417D</sup> Matthew 7:22. These the Pharisees condemned not, but imputed what they did to the Spirit of God, and valued themselves and their nation upon it. It was therefore merely from spite and envy to Christ, that they would own that others cast out devils by the Spirit of God, but suggest that he did it by compact with Beelzebub. Note, It is the way of malicious people, especially the malicious persecutors of Christ and Christianity, to condemn the same thing in those they hate, which they approve of and applaud in those they have a kindness for: the judgments of envy are made, not by things, but persons; not by reason, but prejudice. But those were very unfit to sit in Moses's seat, who knew faces, and knew nothing

else in judgment: *Therefore they shall be your judges*; “This contradicting of yourselves will rise up in judgment against you at the last great day, and will condemn you.” Note, In the last judgment, not only every sin, but every aggravation of it, will be brought into the account, and some of our notions that were right and good will be brought in evidence against us, to convict us of partiality.

**(2.)** This casting out of devils was a certain token and indication of the approach and appearance of the kingdom of God (v. 28); “But if it be indeed that *I cast out devils by the Spirit of God*, as certainly I do, then you must conclude, that though you are unwilling to receive it, yet the kingdom of the Messiah is now about to be set up among you.” Other miracles that Christ wrought proved him *sent of God*, but this proved him sent of God to destroy the devil's kingdom and his works. Now that great promise was evidently fulfilled, that *the seed of the woman should break the serpent's head*, <sup>GEN</sup>Genesis 3:15. “Therefore that glorious dispensation of the kingdom of God, which has been long expected, is now commenced; slight it at your peril.” Note,

**[1.]** The destruction of the devil's power is wrought by the Spirit of God; that Spirit who works to the obedience of faith, overthrows the interest of that spirit who *works in the children of unbelief and disobedience*.

**[2.]** The casting out of devils is a certain introduction to the kingdom of God. If the devil's interest in a soul be not only checked by custom or external restraints, but sunk and broken by the Spirit of God, as a Sanctifier, no doubt but *the kingdom of God is come* to that soul, the kingdom of grace, a blessed earnest of the kingdom of the glory.

**3.** The comparing of Christ's miracles, particularly this of casting out devils, with his doctrine, and the design and tendency of his holy religion, evidenced that he was so far from being in league with Satan, that he was at open enmity and hostility against him (v. 29); *How can one enter into a strong man's house, and plunder his goods, and carry them away, except he first bind the strong man? And then he may do what he pleases with his goods.* The world, that sat in darkness, and lay in wickedness, was in Satan's possession, and under his power, as a house in the possession and under the power of a strong man; so is every unregenerate soul; there Satan resides, there he rules. Now,

(1.) The design of Christ's gospel was to spoil the devil's house, which, as a strong man, he kept in the world; *to turn the people from darkness to light*, from sin to holiness, from this world to a better, *from the power of Satan unto God* (<sup><4038></sup>Acts 26:18); to alter the property of souls.

(2.) Pursuant to this design, he bound the strong man, when he cast out unclean spirits by his word: thus he wrested the *sword* out of the devil's hand, that he might wrest the *sceptre* out of it. The doctrine of Christ teaches us how to construe his miracles, and when he showed how easily and effectually he could cast the devil out of people's bodies, he encouraged all believers to hope that, whatever power Satan might usurp and exercise in the souls of men, Christ by his grace would break it: he will spoil him, for it appears that he can bind him. When nations were turned *from the service of idols to serve the living God*, when some of the worst of sinners were sanctified and justified, and became the best of saints, then Christ spoiled the devil's house, and will spoil it more and more.

4. It is here intimated, that this holy war, which Christ was carrying on with vigour against the devil and his kingdom, was such as would not admit of a neutrality (v. 30), *He that is not with me is against me*. In the little differences that may arise between the disciples of Christ among themselves, we are taught to lessen the matters in variance, and to seek peace, by accounting those who *are not against us, to be with us* (<sup><4185></sup>Luke 9:50); but in the great quarrel between Christ and the devil, no peace is to be sought, nor any such favourable construction to be made of any indifference in the matter; he that is not hearty *for* Christ, will be reckoned with as really *against* him: he that is cold in the cause, is looked upon as an enemy. When the dispute is between God and Baal, there is no halting between two (<sup><4182></sup>1 Kings 18:21), there is no trimming between Christ and Belial; for the kingdom of Christ, as it is eternally opposite to, so it will be eternally victorious over, the devil's kingdom; and therefore in this cause there is no sitting still with *Gilead beyond Jordan, or Asher on the sea-shore*, (<sup><4046></sup>Judges 4:16, 17), we must be entirely, faithfully, and immovably, on Christ's side; it is the *right* side, and will at last be the *rising* side. See <sup><4026></sup>Exodus 32:26.

The latter clause is to the same purport: *He that gathereth not with me scattereth*. Note,

(1.) Christ's errand into the world was to gather, to gather in his harvest, to gather in those whom the Father had given him, <sup><415></sup>John 11:52; <sup><410></sup>Ephesians 1:10.

(2.) Christ expects and requires from those who are with him, that they gather with him; that they not only gather to him themselves, but do all they can in their places to gather others to him, and so to strengthen his interest.

(3.) Those who will not appear, and act, as furtherers of Christ's kingdom, will be looked upon, and dealt with, as hinderers of it; if we *gather not with Christ, we scatter*; it is not enough, not to do hurt, but we must do good. Thus is the breach widened between Christ and Satan, to show that there was no such compact between them as the Pharisees whispered.

V. Here is a discourse of Christ's upon this occasion, concerning tongue-sins; *Wherefore I say unto you*. He seems to turn from the Pharisees to the people, from disputing to instructing; and from the sin of the Pharisees he warns the people concerning three sorts of tongue-sins; for others' harms are admonitions to us.

1. Blasphemous words against the Holy Ghost are the worst kind of tongue-sins, and unpardonable, v. 31, 32.

(1.) Here is a gracious assurance of the pardon of all sin upon gospel terms: this Christ says to us, and it is a comfortable saying, that the greatness of sin shall be no bar to our acceptance with God, if we truly repent and believe the gospel: *All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men*. Though the sin has been *as scarlet and crimson* (<sup><218></sup>Isaiah 1:18), though ever so heinous in its nature, ever so much aggravated by its circumstances, and ever so often repeated, though it *reach up to the heavens, yet with the Lord there is mercy, that reacheth beyond the heavens*; mercy will be extended even to blasphemy, a sin immediately touching God's name and honour. Paul obtained mercy, who had *been a blasphemer*, <sup><515></sup>1 Timothy 1:13. Well may we say, *Who is a God like unto thee, pardoning iniquity?* <sup><378></sup>Micah 7:18. Even *words spoken against the Son of man shall be forgiven*; as theirs were who reviled him at his death, many of whom repented and found mercy. Christ herein has set an example to all the sons of men, to be ready to forgive words spoken against them: *I, as a deaf man, heard not*. Observe, *They shall be forgiven unto men*, not to devils; this is love to the whole world of

mankind, above the world of fallen angels, that all sin is pardonable to them.

(2.) Here is an exception of *the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost*, which is here declared to be the only unpardonable sin. See here,

[1.] What this sin; it is *speaking against the Holy Ghost*. See what malignity there is in tongue-sins, when the only unpardonable sin is so. *But Jesus knew their thoughts*, v. 25. It is not all speaking against the person or essence of the Holy Ghost, or some of his more private operations, or merely the resisting of his internal working in the sinner himself, that is here meant; for *who then should be saved?* It is adjudged in our law, that an act of indemnity shall always be construed in favour of that grace and clemency which is the intention of the act; and therefore the exceptions in the act are not to be extended further than needs must. The gospel is an act of indemnity; none are excepted by name, nor any by description, but those only *that blaspheme the Holy Ghost*; which therefore must be construed in the narrowest sense: all presuming sinners are effectually cut off by the conditions of the indemnity, faith and repentance; and therefore the other exceptions must not be stretched far: and this blasphemy is excepted, not for any defect of mercy in God or merit in Christ, but because it inevitably leaves the sinner in infidelity and impenitency. We have reason to think that none are guilty of this sin, who believe that Christ is *the Son of God*, and sincerely desire to have part in his merit and mercy: and those who fear they have committed this sin, give a good sign that they have not. The learned Dr. Whitby very well observes, that Christ speaks not of what should be (~~Mark~~ Mark 3:28; ~~Luke~~ Luke 12:10); *Whosoever shall blaspheme*. As for those who blasphemed Christ when he was here upon earth, and called him a Winebibber, a Deceiver, a Blasphemer, and the like, they had some colour of excuse, because of the meanness of his appearance, and the prejudices of the nation against him; and the proof of his divine mission was not perfected till after his ascension; and therefore, upon their repentance, they shall be pardoned: and it is hoped that they may be convinced by the pouring out of the Spirit, as many of them were, who had been his betrayers and murderers. But if, when the Holy Ghost is given, in his inward gifts of revelation, speaking with tongues, and the like, such as were the distributions of the Spirit among the apostles, if they continue to blaspheme the Spirit likewise, as an evil spirit, there is no hope of them that they will ever be brought to believe in Christ; for *First*, Those gifts of the Holy Ghost in the apostles

were the last proof that God designed to make use of for the confirming of the gospel, and were still kept in reserve, when other methods preceded. *Secondly*, This was the most powerful evidence, and more apt to convince than miracles themselves. *Thirdly*, Those therefore who blaspheme this dispensation of the Spirit, cannot possibly be brought to believe in Christ; those who shall impute them to a collusion with Satan, as the Pharisees did the miracles, what can convince them? This is such a strong hold of infidelity as a man can never be beaten out of, and is therefore unpardonable, because hereby repentance is hid from the sinner's eyes.

[2.] What the sentence is that is passed upon it; *It shall not be forgiven, neither in this world, nor in the world to come.* As in the then present state of the Jewish church, there was no sacrifice of expiation for *the soul that sinned presumptuously*; so neither under the dispensation of gospel grace, which is often in scripture called *the world to come*, shall there be any pardon to *such as tread underfoot the blood of the covenant, and do despite to the Spirit of grace*: there is no cure for a sin so directly against the remedy. It was a rule in our old law, No sanctuary for sacrilege. Or, *It shall be forgiven neither now*, in the sinner's own conscience, *nor in the great day*, when the pardon shall be published. Or, this is a sin that exposes the sinner both to temporal and eternal punishment, both to present wrath and *the wrath to come*.

2. Christ speaks here concerning other wicked words, the products of corruption reigning in the heart, and breaking out thence, v. 33-35. It was said (v. 25) that *Jesus knew their thoughts*, and here he spoke with an eye to them, showing that it was not strange that they should speak so ill, when their hearts were so full of enmity and malice; which yet they often endeavoured to cloak and cover, by feigning themselves just men. Our Lord Jesus therefore points to the springs and heals them; let the heart be sanctified and it will appear in our words.

(1.) The heart is the *root*, the language is the *fruit* (v. 33); if the nature of the tree be good, it will bring forth fruit accordingly. Where grace is the reigning principle in the heart, the language will be the language of Canaan; and, on the contrary, whatever lust reigns in the heart it will break out; diseased lungs make an offensive breath: men's language discovers what country they are of, so likewise *what manner of spirit they are of*: *“Either make the tree good, and then the fruit will be good; get pure hearts and then you will have pure lips and pure lives; or else the tree will*



*be corrupt, and the fruit accordingly.* you may make a crab-stock to become a good tree, by grafting into it a shoot from a good tree, and then the fruit will be good; but if the tree be still the same, plant it where you will, and water it how you will, the fruit will be still corrupt.” Note, Unless the heart be *transformed*, the life will never be thoroughly *reformed*. These Pharisees were shy of speaking out their wicked thoughts of Jesus Christ; but Christ here intimates, how vain it was for them to seek to hide that root of bitterness in them, that bore this gall and wormwood, when they never sought to mortify it. Note, It should be more our care to be good really, than to seem good outwardly.

(2.) The heart is the *fountain*, the words are the streams (v. 34); *Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks*, as the streams are the overflowings of the spring. A wicked heart is said to *send forth wickedness, as a fountain casts forth her waters*, <sup>(210)</sup>Jeremiah 6:7. *A troubled fountain, and a corrupt spring*, such as Solomon speaks of (<sup>(215)</sup>Proverbs 25:26), must needs *send forth muddy and unpleasant streams*. Evil words are the natural, genuine product of an evil heart. Nothing but the salt of grace, cast into the spring, will heal the waters, *season the speech*, and purify the *corrupt communications*. This they wanted, they were evil; *and how can ye, being evil, speak good things?* They were *a generation of vipers*; John Baptist had called them so (<sup>(218)</sup>Matthew 3:7), and they were still the same; for *can the Ethiopian change his skin?* The people looked upon the Pharisees as a generation of saints, but Christ calls them *a generation of vipers, the seed of the serpent*, that had an enmity to Christ and his gospel. Now what could be expected from *a generation of vipers*, but that which is poisonous and malignant? Can the viper be otherwise than venomous? Note, Bad things may be expected from bad people, as said the proverb of the ancients, *Wickedness proceedeth from the wicked*, <sup>(224)</sup>1 Samuel 24:13. *The vile person will speak villany*, <sup>(236)</sup>Isaiah 32:6. Those who are themselves evil, have neither skill nor will to speak good things, as they should be spoken. Christ would have his disciples know what sort of men they were to live among, that they might know what to look for. They are as Ezekiel *among scorpions* (<sup>(246)</sup>Ezekiel 2:6), and must not think it strange if they be stung and bitten.

(3.) The heart is the *treasury*, the words are the things brought out of that treasury (v. 35); and from hence men's characters may be drawn, and may be judged of.

[1.] It is the character of a *good man*, that he has a *good treasure in his heart*, and from thence *brings forth good things*, as there is occasion. Graces, comforts, experiences, good knowledge, good affections, good resolutions, these are a *good treasure in the heart*; the word of God hidden there, the law of God written there, divine truths dwelling and ruling thee, are a treasure there, valuable and suitable, kept safe and kept secret, as the stores of the good householder, but ready for use upon all occasions. A *good man*, thus furnished, will *bring forth*, as Joseph out of his stores; will be speaking and doing that which is good, for God's glory, and the edification of others. See <sup><301></sup>Proverbs 10:11, 13, 14, 20, 21, 31, 32. This is *bringing forth good things*. Some pretend to good expenses that have not a *good treasure* — such will soon be bankrupts: some pretend to have a good treasure within, but give no proof of it: they hope they have it in them, and thank God, whatever their words and actions are, they have good hearts; but *faith without works is dead*: and some have a *good treasure* of wisdom and knowledge, but they are not communicative, they do not *bring forth* out of it: they have a talent, but know not how to trade with it. The complete Christian in *this* bears the image of God, that he both *is good, and does good*.

[2.] It is the character of an *evil man*, that he has an *evil treasure in his heart*, and out of it *bringeth forth evil things*. Lusts and corruptions dwelling and reigning in the heart are an evil treasure, out of which the sinner brings forth bad words and actions, to the dishonour of God, and the hurt of others. See <sup><005></sup>Genesis 6:5, 12; <sup><058></sup>Matthew 15:18-20; <sup><015></sup>James 1:15. But *treasures of wickedness* (<sup><002></sup>Proverbs 10:2) will be *treasures of wrath*.

3. Christ speaks here concerning *idle words*, and shows what evil there is in them (v. 36, 37); much more is there in such wicked words as the Pharisees spoke. It concerns us to think much of the day of judgment, that *that* may be a check upon our tongues; and let us consider,

(1.) How particular the account will be of tongue-sins in that day: even *for every idle words, or discourse, that men speak, they shall give account*. This intimates,

[1.] That God takes notice of every word we say, even that which we ourselves do not notice. See <sup><004></sup>Psalm 139:4. *Not a word in my tongue but thou knowest it*: though spoken without regard or design, God takes cognizance of it.

[2.] That vain, idle, impertinent talk is displeasing to God, which tends not to any good purpose, is not good to any use of edifying; it is the product of a vain and trifling heart. These *idle words* are the same with that *foolish talking and jesting* which is forbidden, <sup><408></sup>Ephesians 5:4. This is that sin which is seldom wanting in *the multitude of words, unprofitable talk*, <sup><818></sup>Job 15:3.

[3.] We must shortly account for these idle words; they will be produced in evidence against us, to prove us unprofitable servants, that have not improved the faculties of reason and speech, which are part of the talents we are entrusted with. If we repent not of our idle words, and our account for them be not balanced by the blood of Christ, we are undone.

(2.) How strict the judgment will be upon that account (v. 37); *By thy words thou shalt be justified or condemned*; a common rule in men's judgments, and here applied to God's. Note, The constant tenour of our discourse, according as it is gracious or not gracious, will be an evidence for us, or against us, at the great day. Those who seemed to be religious, but bridled not their tongue, will then be found to have put a cheat upon themselves with a vain religion, <sup><3025></sup>James 1:26. Some think that Christ here refers to that of Eliphaz (<sup><8156></sup>Job 15:6), *Thine own mouth condemneth thee, and not I*; or, rather, to that of Solomon (<sup><1082></sup>Proverbs 18:21), *Death and life are in the power of the tongue*.

## <sup><128></sup>MATTHEW 12:38-45

### THE PHARISEES ASK A SIGN

It is probable that these Pharisees with whom Christ is here in discourse were not the same that cavilled at him (v. 24), and would not credit the signs he gave; but another set of them, who saw that there was no reason to discredit them, but would not content themselves with the signs he gave, nor admit the evidence of them, unless he would give them such further proof as they should demand. Here is,

**I.** Their address to him, v. 38. They compliment him with the title of *Master*, pretending respect for him, when they intended to abuse him; all are not indeed Christ's servants, who call him *Master*. Their request is, *We would see a sign from thee*. It was highly reasonable that they should see a

sign, that he should by miracles prove his divine mission: see <sup><1008></sup>Exodus 4:8, 9. He came to take down a model of religion that was set up by miracles, and therefore it was requisite he should produce the same credentials; but it was highly unreasonable to demand a sign now, when he had given so many signs already, that did abundantly prove him *sent of God*. Note, It is natural to proud men to *prescribe* to God, and then to make that an excuse for not *subscribing* to him; but a man's *offence* will never be his *defence*.

## II. His answer to this address, this insolent demand,

**1.** He condemns the demand, as the language of *an evil and adulterous generation*, v. 39. He fastens the charge, not only on *the scribes and Pharisees*, but the whole nation of the Jews; they were all like their leaders, a seed and succession of evil-doers: they were an evil generation indeed, that not only hardened themselves against the conviction of Christ's miracles, but set themselves to abuse him, and put contempt on his miracles. They were *an adulterous generation*,

(1.) As an adulterous brood; so miserably degenerated from the faith and obedience of their ancestors, that Abraham and Israel acknowledged them not. See <sup><2508></sup>Isaiah 57:3. Or,

(2.) As an adulterous wife; they departed from that God, to whom by covenant they had been espoused: they were not guilty of the whoredom of idolatry, as they had been before the captivity, but they were guilty of infidelity, and all iniquity, and that is whoredom too: they did not look after gods of their own making, but they looked for signs of their own devising; and that was adultery.

**2.** He refuses to give them any other sign than he has already given them, but *that of the prophet Jonas*. Note, Though Christ is always ready to hear and answer holy desires and prayers, yet he will not gratify corrupt lusts and humours. Those who *ask amiss, ask, and have not*. Signs were granted to those who desired them for the confirmation of their faith, as to Abraham and Gideon; but were denied to those who demanded them for the excuse of their unbelief.

Justly might Christ have said, They shall never see another miracle: but see his wonderful goodness;

**(1.)** They shall have the same signs still repeated, for their further benefit, and more abundant conviction.

**(2.)** They shall have one sign of a different kind from all these, and that is, *the resurrection of Christ from the dead by his own power*, called here *the sign of the prophet Jonas* this was yet reserved for their conviction, and was intended to be the great proof of Christ's being the Messiah; for by that he was *declared to be the Son of God with power*, <sup><404></sup>Romans 1:4. That was such a sign as surpassed all the rest, completed and crowned them. “*If they will not believe the former signs, they will believe this* (<sup><409></sup>Exodus 4:9), and if this will not convince them, nothing will.” And yet the unbelief of the Jews found out an evasion to shift off that too, by saying, *His disciples came and stole him away*; for none are so incurably blind as those who are resolved they will not see.

Now this sign of the prophet Jonas he further explains here; (v. 40) *As Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly*, and then came out again safe and well, thus Christ shall be so long in the grave, and then shall rise again.

**[1.]** The grave was to Christ as the belly of the fish was to Jonah; thither he was thrown, as a Ransom for lives ready to be lost in a storm; there he lay, as *in the belly of hell* (<sup><319></sup>Jonah 2:2), and seemed to be cast out of God's sight.

**[2.]** He continued in the grave just as long as Jonah continued in the fish's belly, *three days and three nights*; not three whole days and nights: it is probable, Jonah did not lie so long in the whale's belly, but part of three natural days (*nuchthemera*, the Greeks called them); he was buried in the afternoon of the sixth day of the week, and rose again in the morning of the first day; it is a manner of speech very usual; see <sup><119></sup>1 Kings 20:29; <sup><106></sup>Esther 4:16; 5:1; <sup><121></sup>Luke 2:21. So long Jonah was a prisoner for his own sins, so long Christ was a Prisoner for ours.

**[3.]** As Jonah in the whale's belly comforted himself with an assurance that yet he should look again *toward God's holy temple* (<sup><319></sup>Jonah 2:4), so Christ when he lay in the grave, is expressly said to *rest in hope*, as one assured he should *not see corruption*, <sup><426></sup>Acts 2:26, 27.

**[4.]** As Jonah on the third day was discharged from his prison, and came to the land of the living again, from *the congregation of the dead* (for dead

things are said to be *formed from under the waters*, ~~1816~~ Job 26:5), so Christ on the third day should return to life, and rise out of his grave to send abroad the gospel to the Gentiles.

**3.** Christ takes this occasion to represent the sad character and condition of that generation in which he lived, a generation that would not be reformed, and therefore could not but be ruined; and he gives them their character, as it would stand in the day of judgment, under the full discoveries and final sentences of that day. Persons and things now appear under false colours; characters and conditions are here changeable: if therefore we would make a right estimate, we must take our measures from the last judgment; things are really, what they are eternally.

Now Christ represents the people of the Jews,

**(1.)** As a generation that would be condemned by the *men of Nineveh*, whose *repenting at the preaching of Jonas* would *rise up in judgment* against them, v. 41. Christ's resurrection will be the sign of the prophet Jonas to them: but it will not have so happy an effect upon them, as that of Jonas had upon the Ninevites, for they were by it brought to such a repentance as prevented their ruin; but the Jews will be hardened in an unbelief that shall hasten their ruin; and in the day of judgment, the repentance of the Ninevites will be mentioned as an aggravation of the sin, and consequently the condemnation of those to whom Christ preached then, and of those to whom Christ is preached now; for this reason, because Christ is greater than Jonah.

**[1.]** Jonah was but a man, subject to like passions, to like sinful passions, as we are; but Christ is the Son of God.

**[2.]** Jonah was a stranger in Nineveh, he came among the strangers that were prejudiced against his country; but Christ came to his own, when he preached to the Jews, and much more when he is preached among professing Christians, that are called by his name.

**[3.]** Jonah preached but one short sermon, and that with no great solemnity, but as he passed along the streets; Christ renews his calls, sat and taught, taught in the synagogues.

**[4.]** Jonah preached nothing but wrath and ruin within forty days, gave no instructions, directions, or encouragements, to repent: but Christ, besides the warning given us of our danger, has shown wherein we must repent,

and assured us of acceptance upon our repentance, because *the kingdom of heaven is at hand*.

[5.] Jonah wrought no miracle to confirm his doctrine, showed no good will to the Ninevites; but Christ wrought abundance of miracles, and all miracles of mercy: yet the Ninevites *repented at the preaching of Jonas*, but the Jews were not wrought upon by Christ's preaching. Note, The goodness of some, who have less helps and advantages for their souls, will aggravate the badness of those who have much greater. Those who by the twilight discover *the things that belong to their peace*, will shame those who grope at noon-day.

(2.) As a generation that would be condemned by the queen of the south, the queen of Sheba, v. 42. The Ninevites would shame them for not repenting, the queen of Sheba for not believing in Christ. She came from a far country to hear the wisdom of Solomon; yet people will not be persuaded to come and hear the wisdom of Christ, though he is in every thing greater than Solomon.

[1.] The queen of Sheba had no invitation to come to Solomon, nor any promise of being welcome; but we are invited to Christ, to sit at his feet and hear his word.

[2.] Solomon was but a wise man, but Christ is wisdom itself, *in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom*.

[3.] The queen of Sheba had many difficulties to break through; she was a woman, unfit for travel, the journey long and perilous; she was a queen, and what would become of her own country in her absence? We have no such cares to hinder us.

[4.] She could not be sure that it would be worth her while to go so far on this errand; fame uses to flatter men, and perhaps she might have in her own country or court wise men sufficient to instruct her; yet, having heard of Solomon's fame, she would see him; but we come not to Christ upon such uncertainties.

[5.] *She came from the uttermost parts of the earth*, but we have Christ among us, and his word nigh us: *Behold he stands at the door, and knocks*.

[6.] It should seem the wisdom the queen of Sheba came for was only philosophy and politics; but the wisdom that is to be had with Christ is wisdom to salvation.

[7.] She could only *hear* Solomon's wisdom; he could not *give* her wisdom: but Christ will give wisdom to those who come to him; nay, he will himself be *made of God to them Wisdom*; so that, upon all these accounts, if we do not hear the wisdom of Christ, the forwardness of the queen of Sheba to come and hear the wisdom of Solomon will rise up in judgment against us and condemn us; for Jesus Christ is greater than Solomon.

(3.) As a generation that were resolved to continue in the possession, and under the power, of Satan, notwithstanding all the methods that were used to dispossess him and rescue them. They are compared to one out of whom the devil is gone, but returns with double force, v. 43-45. The devil is here called *the unclean spirit*, for he has lost all his purity, and delights in and promotes all manner of impurity among men. Now,

[1.] The parable represents his possessing men's bodies: Christ having lately cast out a devil, and they having said *he had a devil*, gave occasion to show how much they were under the power of Satan. This is a further proof that Christ did not cast out devils by compact with the devil, for then he would soon have returned again; but Christ's ejection of him was final, and such as barred a re-entry: we find him charging the evil spirit to *go out, and enter no more*, <sup><4025></sup>Mark 9:25. Probably the devil was wont sometimes thus to sport with those he had possession of; he would go out, and then return again with more fury; hence the lucid intervals of those in that condition were commonly followed with the more violent fits. When the devil is gone out, he is uneasy, for *he sleeps not except he have done mischief* (<sup><3046></sup>Proverbs 4:16); *he walks in dry places*, like one that is very melancholy; he *seeks rest but finds none*, till he returns again. When Christ cast the legion out of the man, they begged leave to enter into the swine, where they went not long in dry places, but into the lake presently.

[2.] The application of the parable makes it to represent the case of the body of the Jewish church and nation: *So shall it be with this wicked generation*, that now resist, and will finally reject, the gospel of Christ. The devil, who by the labours of Christ and his disciples had been cast out of many of the Jews, sought for rest among the heathen, from whose persons and temples the Christians would every where expel him: so Dr.



Whitby: or finding no where else in the heathen world such pleasant, desirable habitations, to his satisfaction, as here in the heart of the Jews: so Dr. Hammond: he shall therefore enter again into them, for Christ had not found admission among them, and they, by their prodigious wickedness and obstinate unbelief, were still more ready than ever to receive him; and then he shall take a durable possession here, and the state of this people is likely to be more desperately damnable (so Dr. Hammond) than it was before Christ came among them, or would have been if Satan had never been cast out.

The body of that nation is here represented, *First*, As an apostate people. After the captivity in Babylon, they began to reform, left their idols, and appeared with some face of religion; but they soon corrupted themselves again: though they never relapsed into idolatry, they fell into all manner of impiety and profaneness, grew worse and worse, and added to all the rest of their wickedness a wilful contempt of, and opposition to, Christ and his gospel. *Secondly*, As a people marked for ruin. A new commission was passing the seals against that hypocritical nation, the people of God's wrath (like that, <sup><316></sup>Isaiah 10:6), and their destruction by the Romans was likely to be greater than any other, as their sins had been more flagrant: then it was *that wrath came upon them to the uttermost*, <sup><315></sup>1 Thessalonians 2:15, 16. Let this be a warning to all nations and churches, to take heed of leaving their first love, of letting fall a good work of reformation begun among them, and returning to that wickedness which they seemed to have forsaken; *for the last state of such will be worse than the first*.

## <sup><126></sup>MATTHEW 12:46-50

### WHO ARE CHRIST'S RELATIONS

Many excellent, useful sayings came from the mouth of our Lord Jesus upon particular occasions; even his digressions were instructive, as well as his set discourses: as here,

Observe,

**I.** How Christ was interrupted in his preaching by *his mother and his brethren*, that *stood without, desiring to speak with him* (v. 40, 47); which

desire of theirs was conveyed to him through the crowd. It is needless to enquire which of his brethren they were that came along with his mother (perhaps they were those *who did not believe in him*, ~~405~~ John 7:5); or what their business was; perhaps it was only designed to oblige him to break off, for fear he should fatigue himself, or to caution him to take heed of giving offence by his discourse to the Pharisees, and or involving himself in a difficulty; as if they could teach *him* wisdom.

**1.** He was as yet talking to the people. Note, Christ's preaching was talking; it was plain, easy, and familiar, and suited to their capacity and case. What Christ had delivered had been cavilled at, and yet he went on. Note, The opposition we meet with in our work, must not drive us from it. He left off talking with the Pharisees, for he saw he could do no good with them; but continued to talk to the common people, who, not having such a conceit of their knowledge as the Pharisees had, were willing to learn.

**2.** His mother and brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him, when they should have been standing within, desiring to hear him. They had the advantage of his daily converse in private, and therefore were less mindful to attend upon his public preaching. Note, Frequently those who are nearest to the means of knowledge and grace, are most negligent. Familiarity and easiness of access breed some degree of contempt. We are apt to neglect *that* this day, which we think we may have any day, forgetting that it is only the present time we can be sure of; tomorrow is none of ours. There is too much truth in that common proverb, "The nearer the church, the further from God;" it is pity it should be so.

**3.** They not only would not hear him themselves, but they interrupted others that *heard him gladly*. The devil was a sworn enemy to our Saviour's preaching. He had sought to baffle his discourse by the unreasonable cavils of the scribes and Pharisees, and when he could not gain his point that way, he endeavoured to break it off by the unseasonable visits of relations. Note, We often meet with hindrances and obstructions in our work, by our friends that are about us, and are taken off by civil respects from our spiritual concerns. Those who really wish well to us and to our work, may sometimes, by their indiscretion, prove our back-friends, and impediments to us in our duty; as *Peter* was offensive to Christ, with his, "*Master, spare thyself,*" when he thought himself very officious. The mother of our Lord desired to speak with him; it seemed she had not then learned to command her Son, as the iniquity and idolatry of the church of

Rome has since pretended to teach her: nor was she so free from fault and folly as they would make her. It was Christ's prerogative, and not his mother's, to do every thing wisely, and well, and in its season. Christ once said to his mother, *How is it that ye sought me? Wist he not, that I must be about my Father's business?* And it was then said, she *laid up that saying in her heart* (<sup>(429)</sup>Luke 2:49); but if she had remembered it now, she would not have given him this interruption when he was about his Father's business. Note, There is many a good truth that we thought was well laid up when we heard it, which yet is out of the way when we have occasion to use it.

## II. How he resented this interruption, v. 48-50.

1. He would not hearken to it; he was so intent upon his work, that no natural or civil respects should take him off from it. *Who is my mother and who are my brethren?* Not that natural affection is to be put off, or that, under pretence of religion, we may be disrespectful to parents, or unkind to other relations; but *every thing is beautiful in its season*, and the less duty must stand by, while the greater is done. When our regard to our relations comes in competition with the service of God, and the improving of an opportunity to *do good*, in such a case, we must *say to our Father, I have not seen him*, as Levi did, (<sup>(539)</sup>Deuteronomy 33:9. The nearest relations must be comparatively hated, that is, we must love them less than Christ (<sup>(425)</sup>Luke 14:26), and our duty to God must have the preference. This Christ has here given us an example of; *the zeal of God's house* did so far *eat him up*, that it made him not only forget himself, but forget his dearest relations. And we must not take it ill of our friends, nor put it upon the score of their wickedness, if they prefer the pleasing of God before the pleasing of us; but we must readily forgive those neglects which may be easily imputed to a pious zeal for God's glory and others' good. Nay, we must deny ourselves and our own satisfaction, rather than do that which may any way divert our friends from, or distract them in, their duty to God.

2. He took that occasion to prefer his disciples, who were his spiritual kindred, before his natural relations as such: which was a good reason why he would not leave preaching to speak with his brethren. He would rather be profiting his disciples, than pleasing his relations. Observe,

(1.) The description of Christ's disciples. They are such as *do the will of his Father*; not only hear it, and know it, and talk of it, but *do it*; for doing the will of God is the best preparative for discipleship (<sup><407></sup>John 7:17), and the best proof of it (<sup><402></sup>Matthew 7:21); *that* denominates us his disciples indeed. Christ does not say, "Whosoever shall do my will," for he came not to seek or do his own will distinct from his Father's: his will and his Father's are the same; but he refers us to his Father's will, because now in his present state and work he referred himself to it, <sup><468></sup>John 6:38.

(2.) The dignity of Christ's disciples: *The same is my brother, and sister, and mother*. His disciples, that had left all to follow him, and embraced his doctrine, were dearer to him than any that were akin to him according to the flesh. They had preferred Christ before their relations; they *left their father* (<sup><402></sup>Matthew 4:22; 10:37); and now to make them amends, and to show that there was no love lost, he preferred them before his relations. Did not they hereby receive, in point of honour, *a hundred fold*? <sup><409></sup>Matthew 19:29. It was very endearing and very encouraging for Christ to say, *Behold my mother and my brethren*; yet it was not *their* privilege alone, *this honour have all the saints*. Note, All obedient believers are near akin to Jesus Christ. They wear his name, bear his image, have his nature, are of his family. He loves them, converses freely with them as his relations. He bids them welcome to his table, takes care of them, provides for them, sees that they want nothing that is fit for them: when he died he left them rich legacies, now he is in heaven he keeps up a correspondence with them, and will have them all with him at last, and will in nothing fail to *do the kinsman's part* (<sup><403></sup>Ruth 3:13), nor will ever be ashamed of his poor relations, but will confess them before men, before the angels, and before his Father.