

THE PARABLES OF JESUS, #011

A Chronological Study

"Pharisee's Blasphemy of The Holy Spirit"
Matthew 12:22-32; 33-37; Mark 3:31-35



"Jerusalem leaders in the synagogue as Jesus confronts them"

*"To Him who opened His mouth in parables and
uttered things hidden since the creation of the world."*
Psalm 78:2

INTRODUCTION

We need to slow down a bit while considering this parable, it is complex and deep in meaning and importance. As we often have said, and will continue to say, "Context is everything!"

This parable is mentioned in two of the Gospels, Matthew, and Mark. In both cases this event is early in Jesus' public ministry. Matthew is a much longer book than Mark and that's why this story occurs so many chapters later than in Mark's version. Matthew begins with Jesus' life story and Mark spends one chapter on John the Baptist and gets right into Jesus' public ministry.

In Matthew's Gospel the Sermon on the Mount and other preliminary items of Christian faith take us to the end of Chapter 7. Then Jesus heals a man with Leprosy, and then He speaks of a Roman Centurion to be a man that "I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith." This is a great "telling remark" of the whole story that Matthew, and the other Gospel writers, reveal. In the Promised land of God's Promised people... a conquering gentile outsider is found to have more, and better faith... than in all of Israel. This is the beginning of Jesus' journey to the Cross.

Preliminary, Pre-Parable Information: Matthew 12:01-21

At the beginning of the chapter Jesus and His disciples were walking through a field ripe with grain one Sabbath Saturday and they were picking and eating some of it.

Some Pharisees saw them doing this and reprimanded Jesus for doing this on the Sabbath. Jesus then reprimanded them for not knowing their own Scriptures and what they mean – "*I desire mercy, not sacrifice.*"

And he tells them if they had known... "You would not have condemned the innocent for the Son of Man is The Lord of the Sabbath" [Hosea 6:6].

A quick explanation here: The Law of God that had been presented to Moses was explicit as to worship, the priesthood, and the sacrifices. God was explicit in explaining that He wanted Israel's love and obedience. Their teachers, due to their hardened hearts, taught that obedience to the "law" was most essential. Over time the Rabbis distorted God's desire for Love and mercy into an adherence to a greatly expanded system of law. In this encounter Jesus is explaining to the Pharisees that if they had properly known and understood God and His purposes in the law... they would have known that if His Son, and His followers, were hungry... while doing His will, then "mercy" would be God's demand from His law. God would desire that His Son, and His disciples, would freely eat from the fields of grain – even on the Sabbath – with the result that they would have found Jesus, and His disciples, innocent of any charge for eating this grain on the Sabbath. It also should be noted that these Pharisees were most likely spying on Jesus in order to attempt to bring charges against Him. We've learned from our earlier lessons that it was early on in Jesus' ministry that the Pharisees began to keep a careful watch on Jesus to "destroy Him" [Matthew 2:13; Matthew 12:14; Mark 3:6; Mark 11:18; Luke 19:47].

Then they left that place and went to a local synagogue. A man with a shriveled hand was there and the leadership there sought to bring charges against Jesus, they asked Him if it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath.

Jesus's reaction was immediate. "Stretch out your hand," He said, to the crippled man – and it was restored. The Pharisees came in to bring charges against Him and they went out plotting how they might kill Him. This was another moment when they should have, and we should consider that God desires "Mercy and not Sacrifice."

Matthew tells us that this was all done to fulfill the Prophet Isaiah's words:

"Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations. He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he has brought justice through to victory. In his name the nations will put their hope." [Isaiah 42:1-4]

Jesus' disciples, and all those around Him, never really understood who He was until after His death and resurrection. Most today still don't understand – even in some of our best Bible believing churches. His words to the leaders in that synagogue at the beginning of the chapter, "*I desire mercy, not sacrifice,*" are some of the most important words to be read and memorized by every believer. They ought to govern every aspect of our Christian lives. Our human response to the Scriptures is all too often "sacrifice/works/law" and not mercy. "tow the line," instead of following our Savior's love. We need to be asking the question: "how can I, just another sinner saved by God's grace, be merciful to my neighbor?" "How can I be the servant... and give my life for You like You gave Your life for me?"

Introduction to our text:

To help follow our story line and get the fullest picture of the parables involved, I've taken the best lines from both authors and produced a "linear text" of the story. We'll then do our commentary line-by-line, paragraph-by-paragraph as we travel through the text.

Just previously, according to Mark, Jesus had called out 12 of His disciples to be His apostles – His future ambassadors. Matthew points out that on their way to a synagogue they were harassed by some Pharisees whom Jesus had to correct their lack of knowledge about their own scriptures as to who He was. Matthew also included Isaiah's prophecy concerning the then coming Anointed One, pointing out that God's love, mercy, and Grace will be the characteristics of His Messiah.

The Parable Text:

[Mt 12:22-23]

Then they brought him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see. All the people were astonished and said, "Could this be the Son of David?"

I'm sure we would have all been completely astonished if we had been there and seen this event. This wasn't some quiet and inattentive person. This man was demon possessed and acting as such. Demon possession is brought up here as the key element that caused the gathered crowd to be so amazed – that they asked,

"Could this [healer] be the Son of David?" The Messiah? Jesus completely heals him, he can hear, he can speak, he can see, and he is no longer possessed by his demons, no longer blaspheming, or cursing. I'm often amused when I return home from a visit to my doctor and see on the paperwork that my health is described as "unremarkable." This man, when Jesus has finished with him, his health is REMARKABLE! *"Could this [healer] be the Son of David?" – God the Father's Anointed One, The Messiah, The Christ?* Who else could have so miraculously changed this man?

[Mk 3:22]

And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, "He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons He is driving out demons."

First, a word about Beelzebul (Beelzebub, Baal, Baalzebub, Lucifer, etc.). This demonic creature is mentioned nine times in the New Testament [and in the telling of this incident] and once in the Old Testament. In 2 Kings, Chapter 1, it is the name for the god of the Philistine city of Ekron and is considered to be the prince of the devils – and referenced as Satan himself.

Can you imagine the pre-hardened hearts of the "teachers of the law" who came down from Jerusalem to catch and charge Jesus with violating their version of God's law? There was Jesus, a single itinerate preacher of God's Word, working His way through the general population, telling of the grace, mercy, and love of His heavenly Father... being chased after and conspired against by the religious leadership of God's own chosen

people – who are telling their people (the chosen people of God) that Jesus, the very Son of God, is instead... demon possessed and acting directly through the power of Satan himself. This is the state of the nation of Israel in the days of the Savior.

[Mt 12:25a] Jesus knew their thoughts. [Mk 3:23-27a] So Jesus called them over to Him and began to speak to them in parables:

One of the most important beliefs in the Christian faith is the Deity of Jesus. So, He knew their thoughts. We also believe, based on God's Word, that in order for Jesus to accomplish the full will of His heavenly Father (become a true servant) here on earth, He had to give up, yield the use of, certain powers and abilities that were His as God ("He experienced the limitations of a human being, He willingly humbled Himself, Jesus' glory was veiled, He lived the life of a servant, He did not know certain things, He was continuously Self-limited, He was always guided by the Holy Spirit") [Philippians 2:7, You will find an interesting article concerning this topic by Don Stewart at BlueLetterBible.org].

Can you visualize Jesus as the leader of this small group of men turning to the religious leaders who came from Jerusalem and saying, "You, come over here... I have things to tell you." And they came over to Him... He then speaks to them in parables – probably humiliating them by using that approach, for parables are illustrations "tossed alongside" the main points. Jesus did not tell them the main points, but just the illustrations – letting them discern what He was talking about, if they could.

The short reason why Jesus taught in parables is explained in the book of Matthew. God's chosen people had become "dull of hearing" the things of God, so much so that, "Hearing you will hear and shall not understand" [Matthew 13:14; a quote from Isaiah 6:9]. Often, after Jesus would speak in a parable, He then would take His disciples aside and explain the meaning to them alone [Matthew 13:10-17; 2 Timothy 3:7; John 16:13].

[Mk 3:23-27a cont.] "How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come. In fact, no one can enter a strong man's house [Mt 12:29b] and carry off his possessions [Mk 3:27b] without first tying him up. Then he can plunder the strong man's house.

Maybe it's just me, but Here's Jesus addressing Jerusalem's leadership, who have traveled to the lake of Galilee to entrap Him and they have begun with a ridiculous statement. "He's healed this demoniac man by the power of Satan." If it had been anyone but Jesus they would have begun with, "What... are you stupid? Why would Satan be casting out his demons who are doing Satan's work?" I'm pretty sure those standing around them in the synagogue thought something similar right away.

Then Jesus goes on with a three-fold statement about "cannot stand." His first is a kingdom divided against itself – cannot stand. This should have immediately gotten their attention for buried in their past is the tragic

division of their own kingdom (when it was a kingdom). Israel was torn apart by unbelief and ten of the unbelieving tribes of their kingdom separated from the two believing tribes of Judah and Benjamin. The nation of Israel to the north (unbelieving) did not stand and was conquered by Assyria and taken North into captivity. The nation of Judah (believing and then unbelieving) did not stand and was conquered by Babylon and taken East into captivity there. Yes, "a kingdom divided cannot stand."

Jesus then focuses upon the "House of Israel," the priesthood, now lost in unbelief and worshipping the Law instead of their God. Yes, a house divided cannot stand." Perhaps Jesus is warning them of their eventual condition—for it would only be a few years before Rome would destroy the temple and the Jews would be forced to flee.

And finally, Jesus focuses upon the followers of Satan... not to speak of the satanic kingdom, but to press the point of their own leadership proclaiming that the righteous and delivering biblical words and actions of Jesus are from the evil one himself. If Satan were to oppose himself... even he could not stand... even they will fall as they oppose God's chosen servant, His own Son.

[Mt 12:27] And if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your people drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. [Mt 12:28] But, if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you.

He then turns directly to them and questions that if He drives out demons by Beelzebul... then by who do the religious leaders (sons of Israel) drive out the demons? And if they are driving out the "demons" by Satan, then he [Satan] will be their judge – for eternity.

He then warns them, "*if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you.*" Put yourself in their place. You have made up this demon story about Jesus to turn the people against Jesus. Now you must consider what you have done as "*the Kingdom of God has come upon you!*"



Moses and the Brazen Serpent

[Mt 12:30] Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. [Mk 3:28] Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin. He said this because they were saying, "He has an impure [demonic] spirit." [Mark uses the word "impure spirit" 13 times in his Gospel to denote demons].

As we enter this section it is supremely important that we remember what Matthew says about this section. Jesus has made a statement about blaspheming the Holy Spirit,

and that it would never be forgiven. Please note, that Matthew was concerned about what we might think this was about, he wrote down for us... "He said this because they (the subject of Jesus words) were saying, 'He (Jesus) has a demonic, satanic spirit.' " Jesus has said that people can be forgiven all their sins, but..." The context of these statements is that these leaders of Israel's "religion" stated that Jesus has, or is, a demonic spirit." They will never be forgiven for this, period. We know from the rest of the Bible that these leaders never turned to Jesus in faith – being forgiven for this blasphemy, concerning the Spirit of God. Their judgment is eternal. The result of their own heart's intentions against their Savior God was His death upon the Cross, and the Justification and righteousness that was the result was certainly not their intent.

Don't get all wrapped up in issues about speaking against God's Holy Spirit today and not being able to be forgiven for it. That's not what these verses are about. The Apostle Paul is the best example of the grace and mercy of God, by the Holy Spirit of God, through the Savior Jesus. Paul was born about 5 years after Jesus. He was only about 25 when Jesus died on the Cross. He wasn't old enough to qualify as an adult member of the local synagogue. When he was old enough it took time for him to be regarded as an elder, time for him to begin persecuting the church and gain notoriety for doing so. At the peak of his anti-Christ (anti-Holy Spirit of God) career, Jesus reached out to him and "turned him around," and "saved" him. And then used Him remarkably as the most prolific teacher and writer of the New Testament.

You are not in danger of never being able to be forgiven for anything... until you are dead. Then there are no second chances, there is no purgatory where you can "work" off your offenses. If you have not bowed your life before Jesus the Christ and believed Him, and believed in Him, before you have died... you stand already condemned to spend your eternity apart from God in the place of eternal perishing.

[Mt 12:33] "*Make a tree good and its fruit will be good or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit.*

Jesus is saying to His detractors, look at my fruit! Healing people, helping people, leading people to an understanding of the Old Testament, forgiving them. Where is my bad fruit? Now, look at yourselves... What kind of fruit is being produced? They were, and you and I are recognized by our fruit.

[Mt 12:34a] "*You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good?*

In the Old Testament book of Numbers, Chapter 21, Moses writes the story of the Israelites raising up and speaking against God and Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness... Then the Lord sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died." The people repented and "The Lord said to Moses, "Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live" [Numbers 21:4-9]. That's the reference here. Nothing

happens by chance. God is the author, and this is His story. The religious leaders are His doing, because of the people's speaking against God. The end result will be the saving of God's people. God placed Jesus up on the arms of the cross. Bitten by sin? Jesus invites all who have been bitten to look upon that Cross and believe... and they--you will live.

[Mt 12:34b-37] *"For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned."*

While Jesus is speaking to these vile religious leaders, He is speaking to all of us at the same time. **Jeremiah 17:9** reminds us that, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" When I say "all of us" I mean exactly that. This verse applies to both the saved and the unsaved, the believer and the non-believer. It is a statement about the state of the human mind, heart, and soul. As a believer, I know that deep down within I want my own way, I desire to own, run, and rule all else. God in His mercy has reached out and brought me new life... But the struggle with the "old man" continues every day. Jesus' closing words to this crowd at the synagogue speaks to both the religious leaders, the people there, and Jesus' own disciples. Saved or unsaved... God's judgment stands at the end of our lives. While salvation will get the saved into God's Kingdom...

we will still have to stand before Him and give account for what we have done and said during our lives. If you can look back and see where your actions and/or words have been used to satisfy your own wicked desires (family, friends, loved ones, co-workers, everyone your life has ever touched) then, if they are still alive... please reach out to them and ask and offer forgiveness. Tell them of the changes Christ has made in your heart. You are not responsible for changing them, but you are responsible for telling them.

The next parable is a continuation of this theme, and we'll see that next time in The Parables of Jesus, 012, "Jesus' True Family and Kinship" – which is introduced by "The Sign of Jonah."

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS WITHOUT ANSWERS

- 1. Why were the Pharisees [Mt 12:1-21] out in the fields when they saw Jesus and His disciples picking and eating grain?**
 - 2. In Matthew 12:9 ff Jesus goes to a synagogue – on the Sabbath – and the Pharisees who have been following Him asked if it was legal to heal on the Sabbath. How did Jesus answer them?**
 - 3. The Old Testament Prophetic book of Hosea 6:6 contains one of the most important facts about salvation found in scripture – can you quote it?**
 - 4. In the quote from Isaiah 42:1-4, what was Matthew's message concerning the Law and Grace?**
 - 5. In Matthew 12:22-23 Jesus heals a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute. Jesus healed him – what was the crowd's reaction?**
 - 6. What was the reaction of the Pharisees?**
 - 7. Why does Jesus call these Pharisees, "a brood of vipers"?**
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FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS WITH ANSWERS

- 8. Why were the Pharisees [Mt 12:1-21] out in the fields when they saw Jesus and His disciples picking and eating grain?**

The New Testament writers report to us that the Pharisees instructed their people to keep an eye on Jesus and His disciples to catch them breaking the law – so they were following Jesus everywhere He went.

- 9. In Matthew 12:9 ff Jesus goes to a synagogue – on the Sabbath – and the Pharisees who have been following Him asked if it was legal to heal on the Sabbath. How did Jesus answer them?**

He reminded them that a man is of more value than a sheep – then He healed a man with a withered arm right before their eyes.

- 10. The Old Testament Prophetic book of Hosea 6:6 contains one of the most important facts about salvation found in scripture – can you quote it?**

“For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.”
[KJV]

- 11. In the quote from Isaiah 42:1-4, what was Matthew’s message concerning the Law and**

Grace?

Matthew interjects Isaiah's words that outline the savior that was to come – chosen, loved, delighted in, indwelt with God's Holy Spirit, proclaimer of justice to the world. He wouldn't break a reed or snuff out a candle until victory was His. The nations would hope in Him.

12. In Matthew 12:22-23 Jesus heals a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute. Jesus healed him – what was the crowd's reaction?

The context hints that it possibly was the Pharisees who brought forth this demoniac in an attempt to prove that Jesus really couldn't heal someone so depraved. When Jesus healed him, the crowd went wild – "Could this be the Son of David" (the Messiah).

13. What was the reaction of the Pharisees?

I think this healing completely took them by surprise. They brought this demoniac forward in order to embarrass Jesus, instead they were the ones who were embarrassed, and they responded that only the "prince of demons" could have done this.

14. Why does Jesus call these Pharisees, "a brood of vipers"?

The reference is most likely to refer to the Book of Numbers, Chapter 21, when the people of Israel had turned against God and Moses. So much that God brought vipers among the people because of their rebellion in order to bring repentance. He then instructed Moses to place a serpent upon a pole and told the people that, "if you look upon it, you will be healed." Here in our text Jesus is pointing out the lack of faith and the rebellion of the nation against God that can only be healed with repentance and turning to their Savior... which they will not do. Instead, they will raise Him up on a post and put Him to death... and through Him will come the grace and mercy of God upon the people of the earth.

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Jeremiah 18:15

"Don't stumble from the Ancient Path"

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