

Thursday, March 9, 2023
Season of Lent
Day 14

Matthew 12:22–37

²² 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. ²³ All the people were astonished and said, “Could this be the Son of David?”

²⁴ But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, “It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons.”

²⁵ Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand. ²⁶ If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? ²⁷ And if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your people drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. ²⁸ But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

²⁹ “Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man’s house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can plunder his house.

³⁰ “Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. ³¹ And so I tell you, every kind of sin and slander can be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. ³² Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

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. ³⁴ You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.

³⁵ 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. ³⁶ But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. ³⁷ For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.”

Reflection

Once again we have an example of Jesus reversing the effect of idolatry—inability to see or speak. Now people are speculating, “Might this be the Messiah?” The Pharisees’, who have determined that Jesus cannot be because he doesn’t keep the Sabbath, want to give an emphatic “no!” But, they also need to give an alternative explanation as to how Jesus is doing what he is doing. So, they conclude that he is using a demonic power (magic) to drive demons out of people. In other words, they too are blind (to what is actually happening) and they too cannot speak (rightly, as they give credit to Satan).

Jesus demonstrates the folly of their words; if what they say is true then Satan’s kingdom is fallen. And, it is! The strong man (Satan) has been bound and as a result those under his power can now be freed. But, not by Satan. Rather, by the very Spirit of God. These miraculous events ought to be clear evidence that God’s kingdom has trumped Satan’s. To then attribute the God’s power to Satan’s is blasphemous.

Of course, evangelicals, who have been taught to apply everything to their lives, are terrified that they have somehow, without knowing it, blasphemed the Holy Spirit and are thus unsaved. While it is not a bad thing to take care with how we speak, that is not the point of the passage. Jesus calls them a “brood of vipers,” but he isn’t name calling. He is, once more, alerting them to awake them. Go back to Genesis 3:14–15. There will come from the woman children of the serpent (evil/sin ruled) and children of the promise (redemptive/representative). It’s not about snake babies and human babies. The promise there is that while evil will do damage, God will overcome it through his (person of) promise. Jesus is showing them who they are: children of the serpent. That’s why they speak of the Spirit the way they do. If they persist to speak this way they will be destroyed in line with the ancient promise and prophecy.

So, how should this passage ‘apply’ to us? We want to discern who Jesus is: Son of David or Messiah. We do not want to stand in people’s way from encountering him and receiving his freedom. We want to be with him and for him. Therefore we will take care of the words of our mouth, to bring forward what is good and fruitful. For those still worried of ‘committing the unforgivable sin,’ let me repeat my New Testament professor “the only sin that God won’t forgive is the sin of which we are unwilling to repent.”

Prayer

Lord, you have made us your children of promise in Christ Jesus our Lord, the Messiah. Thank you for your grace and redemption. Help us to guard our tongue and properly discern when you are at work. Amen.