

Life Group Questions

October 16th, 2022

The Power of the Good Treasure - Pastor Ray Harms-Wieb – [Matthew 12:22-37](#)

To the Life Group leader: thank you for your ministry leading this Life Group. **Take time to review the questions, selecting those you believe will be most helpful for your group study.** You will not have time to use all the questions. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you as you lead, as you select questions, and as you guide the discussion.

Reconnect

Come together with these preliminary questions:

- How has God gifted you to serve Him?
- How will you serve Him this fall at Willingdon Church?
- Where has God placed you in the city? What is your role there?

Open in Prayer

Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you through the text, the questions, and each other.

Message Recap Questions

Review the message using these questions

1. What stood out to you most in this week's message?
2. What was the most meaningful thing you heard in the message? Why?
3. What questions are still lingering?

Questions

1. Describe Jesus' miracle in Matthew 12:22? What does this show about His power?
2. How did Jesus' miracles affect the multitudes (Matthew 12:23)? What does this show about the purpose of miracles?
3. How did the Pharisees explain Jesus' ability to cast out demons (Matthew 12:24)? Did the Pharisees deny the miracle occurred? What should they have learned?
4. In response to the Pharisees' accusation, what illustrations did Jesus use in Matthew 12:25-26? Explain the application to the Pharisees.
5. Besides the application that Jesus made in the context, what lessons can we learn about unity versus division from His illustrations?
6. What question did Jesus ask the Pharisees in Matthew 12:27? Explain the point.

7. Having refuted the Pharisees' accusation, where did Jesus say He received His power (Matthew 12:28)? What would this prove? (How does this confirm the purpose of miracles?)
8. What illustration did Jesus use in Matthew 12:29? Explain how this should help us understand Jesus' relationship to Beelzebub.
9. What alternatives does Jesus describe in Matthew 12:30? What was the application to the Pharisees, and what lessons should we learn?
10. Define blasphemy (Matthew 12:31-32). What blasphemy did Jesus say would not be forgiven in contrast to that which would be forgiven?
11. What is the point of the illustration of the tree and its fruit (Matthew 12:33)? What application did this have to the Pharisees (Matthew 12:34)?
12. What lesson should we learn about our hearts in relationship to our conduct (Matthew 12:35)?
13. How important are the words that we speak according to Matthew 12:36-37? Explain what is meant by 'careless words'?

Choose Your Next Step

What next step will you commit to for the upcoming week (and beyond)?

Closing Prayer

A closing prayer is an effective way to point people back to our Loving Father as they seek to apply their new learnings throughout the week. Ask group members to share what they sense God calling them to. Pray for each other and commit to continue to do so during the week as people step out in obedience to God's leading.

Commentary

1. Describe Jesus' miracle in Matthew 12:22? What does this show about His power?

For Matthew's use of *then* see on 2:7; it does not necessarily signify that what he next narrates took place immediately after the preceding, merely that it was later in time. Luke speaks of Jesus' healing a dumb demoniac, but only Matthew says that the man was *blind* as well. This man was brought to Jesus, though none of the Evangelists says who brought him (but being blind and dumb he certainly needed help). There is no indication how Jesus performed the healing, whether with laying on hands or with a word or in some other way. Matthew concentrates on the fact of healing, without specification of the means; indeed, few healings are described as briefly as this one; the Evangelist seems to be more intent on the controversy to which the incident led than on the healing itself. It is unusual to have a demoniac described as healed more commonly the demon is said to be "cast out." But Matthew has other things to say, and he moves through this healing quickly: it is really the trigger for the discussion that follows. Matthew specifies that the man both *spoke and saw*; the cure was complete.

2. How did Jesus' miracles affect the multitudes (Matthew 12:23)? What does this show about the purpose of miracles?

The people who witnessed the cure *were astonished*. Characteristically Matthew says that *all* had this experience, and he uses the plural for *crowds* (the combination *all the crowds* occurs here only in this Gospel). Matthew emphasizes the impact of what Jesus had done; not just a handful of the people were affected but *all the crowds*. This is the one place in his Gospel where Matthew says that Jesus had this effect on the crowds. He is describing something very unusual, which may explain the strong reaction of the Pharisees and the discussion that followed. The response of the people is crystallized in a question: "*Can this be the Son of David?*" The question is worded in such a way as to indicate a measure of perplexity, but also to open the door to an interesting possibility. Jesus was so unlike what they expected in the Messiah, but could he yet really be the Son of David? Like the Pharisees they probably did not look for the Messiah in such a person as the Man from Nazareth, but unlike them they were open-minded enough to ask the question. They are clearly using the expression "Son of David" as equivalent to "Messiah," and they are so impressed by the miracle they had witnessed that they wonder whether they are in the presence of the Messiah.

3. How did the Pharisees explain Jesus' ability to cast out demons (Matthew 12:24)? Did the Pharisees deny the miracle occurred? What should they have learned?

But is adversative and sets the Pharisees in contrast to the crowds. Unlike the crowds they were not puzzled: they were sure that Jesus was evil, and they gave expression to this conviction by explaining how Jesus cast out demons. *This fellow* is contemptuous; their statement is confident. They are sure that the only way Jesus can cast out demons is with the help of one they name as *Beelzeboul* and describe as *the ruler of the demons*. Jesus is in league with the powers of evil, they say, and because the prince of the forces of evil is at work in him he is able to do things that ordinary people cannot do. They were spectators of some of

the wonderful things that God did through Jesus and were perverse enough to ascribe these divine works to the forces of evil. The same charge is made in 10:25.

4. In response to the Pharisees' accusation, what illustrations did Jesus use in Matthew 12:25-26? Explain the application to the Pharisees.

Matthew tells us that Jesus *knew their thoughts*; he may be ascribing supernatural knowledge to the Lord or he may mean that Jesus had the normal human capacity for penetrating to some extent into what others have in mind (people sometimes say, "I know what you're thinking!"). Whichever it was, Jesus was aware that they ascribed his good deeds to Satan, so he pointed out that the facts were all against it. He starts with the general proposition that a divided group, be it a kingdom or a house or a city, is impotent; it cannot overcome its opponents. In this Gospel *kingdom* mostly refers to the kingdom of heaven, but here it clearly refers to the ordinary kingdoms of the earth. If a kingdom is united it may well set forth its aims, but if it is divided the factions waste their energy in disputing with those who ought to be their allies. The result is disaster for the kingdom. There is no future for a kingdom divided against itself, and the same is true for smaller groupings (Jesus retains the same expression for divided against itself but changes *ruined* to *will not stand*). Factional strife and division are just as fatal to success in the smaller sphere of a city or household as in the larger affairs of a kingdom; it will always prevent the group from standing firm and holding its ground whatever the ground may be. This is an elementary piece of the wisdom of this world, and Jesus is suggesting that the Pharisees are naive if they think that Satan is not well aware of it.

From his hypothetical kingdom or city or family Jesus moves to Satan and looks at what would happen if what the Pharisees were saying were in fact correct. His conditional is put positively: "If it were really to happen—" If it is by Beelzeboul that Jesus casts out devils, then Satan is in effect casting himself out: he would then be enabling Jesus to deliver people from his own power. That would mean hopeless division in the ranks of evil, with demon ranged against demon. In that case how could Satan effect his purpose? Satan would be removing Satan from the afflicted man and thus diminishing his sphere of influence while delivering the man over into the sphere of goodness. It is not to be presumed that Satan is stupid: the Pharisees were taking up an impossible position. Theoretically, of course, it might be argued that Satan could allow the expulsion of one demon in order to effect some diabolical purpose, but this would be met by the fact that Jesus kept on expelling demons; he carried on an unrelenting war against all the demonic forces.

5. Besides the application that Jesus made in the context, what lessons can we learn about unity versus division from His illustrations?
6. What question did Jesus ask the Pharisees in Matthew 12:27? Explain the point.

And adds another to Jesus' objections to the Pharisaic position, "introducing someth. new, w. loose connection". The conditional construction is the same as that in verse 26, and again it is put strongly to indicate what consequences would follow if it were the case. *I* is emphatic: Jesus is stressing that it is the things that he, being who and what he is, does. It prepares for the contrast that follows. "Let us suppose for a moment that you are right," he is saying, "then what follows in the case of other exorcists?" There were apparently many who claimed to cast out demons, and some of them could be characterized as *your sons*. The expression is important, and it is set forth in a way that gives it emphasis: "your sons, by whom do they cast

out?” Matthew is fond of the word “son,” which he uses more often than in any other New Testament book (89 times). It most often denotes the male child of a parent, of course, but it may be used also in the sense of a pupil, one who was a son in the sense of deriving his academic being from his tutor; it may be used here in the sense that the people of whom Jesus was speaking derived their spiritual being from their Pharisaic tutors. The only possible logic behind the Pharisaic position was that a mere human could not overcome a demon. If Jesus did have such a victory, therefore, it would show that he had aid from a superhuman source, and in their hostility their logic led them to hold that that source could only be Satan. But they had spoken hurriedly; they had not stopped to reflect that some of their own people claimed to cast out demons. The Pharisees would have vehemently denied that their sons were in league with the evil one, but they had not realized that such exorcisms said something about Jesus also. Therefore *they will be your judges*; your own sons will prove you wrong! The logic of a Pharisaic denial that their followers cast out demons through the evil one meant that Jesus did not use the powers of evil either. Their sons would be able to testify to the fact that casting out demons was not a work of Satan. They would “judge” them for ascribing to Satan what they, the exorcists, knew came from God.

7. Having refuted the Pharisees’ accusation, where did Jesus say He received His power (Matthew 12:28)? What would this prove? (How does this confirm the purpose of miracles?)

But if introduces the contrary position. *I* is the emphatic pronoun again, and the construction assumes that Jesus does in fact cast out demons by the Spirit of God. Jesus invites his hearers to reflect on the implications of this fact. Nobody disputes the fact of his exorcisms; the only question is the source of his power. For *Spirit* see on 1:18; here *the Spirit of God* precedes *I*, though “*I*” precedes “by Beelzeboul” in verse 27; the effect is to give strong emphasis to *the Spirit of God* (in the parallel passage Luke has “the finger of God” [Luke 11:20; cf. Exod. 8:19; 31:18]; both ways of putting it emphasize that the power is from God). If, as Jesus says, his power came from the Spirit of God, then there are implications. *Then* there *has come upon you* nothing less than *the kingdom of God*. This expression (found again in 19:24; 21:31, 43; Matthew mostly has “kingdom of heaven”) is put last in the sentence, a position that gives it emphasis. The coming of the kingdom is to be discerned in Jesus’ defeat of the demons. Mostly Matthew speaks of the kingdom as future, but here it is a present reality.

8. What illustration did Jesus use in Matthew 12:29? Explain how this should help us understand Jesus’ relationship to Beelzebub.

Or is a disjunctive particle that introduces an alternative way of looking at the facts. Jesus puts this in the form of a question; he asks how anyone can take possession of the goods of the strong man unless he first binds him. He speaks of entering the man’s *house*, which, of course, would be the part of his possessions that he would guard most closely. Jesus does not explain who he means by the *strong man*, but it seems clearly enough to be a designation of Satan; the alternative is to regard Jesus as speaking in parabolic fashion of any mighty man here on earth (as Isaiah does, Isa. 49:24–25). Such a man’s possessions are safe until he is overcome. In that case we are to think of Satan as being in much the position of the strong man; therefore the two interpretations come to much the same in the end. Jesus asks how anyone can *enter the strong man’s house and seize his goods* unless he first *binds the strong man*, which means that he must overcome him. While he has any strength left the strong man will resist being bound, and when at length he is bound that in itself is clear proof that he has been defeated.

When that happens his house and all that is in it is at the mercy of the conqueror: he *will plunder his house*. The picture is that of a tyrant in complete and utter defeat.

9. What alternatives does Jesus describe in Matthew 12:30? What was the application to the Pharisees, and what lessons should we learn?

The illustration has brought out the point that Jesus is engaged in a struggle with a powerful enemy. Now he goes on to the point that in this struggle there is no neutrality. In any moral issue we are forced to take sides. I may have little power to influence the outcome, but if I do nothing I am saying in effect, "As far as I am concerned the tyrant can do as he wishes." So Jesus says of anyone who does not side with him in his conflict with evil that this person *is against me*. His influence, however great or small it is, is not thrown into the cause of good and therefore it helps the cause of evil. The same point is made with gathering and scattering. The imagery is apparently taken from tending flocks. Animals tend to scatter, and if any given person takes no part in gathering the scattered members he in effect scatters them; by doing nothing he casts his vote in favor of scattering.

10. Define blasphemy (Matthew 12:31-32). What blasphemy did Jesus say would not be forgiven in contrast to that which would be forgiven?

There are consequences of this impossibility of neutrality. *For this reason* links what follows closely to the preceding, and *I say to you* lends a certain solemnity to the words. *Sin* is here linked with *blasphemy*. When Jesus says that every sin and blasphemy *will be forgiven* he does not, of course, mean that these sins are not serious or that they will automatically be set aside. They will be forgiven in the normal way of forgiveness when the sinner repents and seeks pardon in penitence and lowliness and faith. Sins of this kind are serious; if they are not repented of and forgiven, they will have eternal consequences. But they are forgivable.

Jesus contrasts this with another sin that he calls *the blasphemy of the Spirit*, a sin that will not be forgiven. We must understand this in the context of the Pharisaic attribution to Satan of the good deeds Jesus was doing. The sin that cannot be forgiven is not to be understood as the utterance of any particular form of words. It is impossible to hold that any form of words is unforgivable, granted that the sinner subsequently repents and turns to God. Jesus is talking about the set of the life, not any one isolated saying. When a person takes up a position like that of the Pharisees, when, not by way of misunderstanding but through hostility to what is good, that person calls good evil and, on the other hand, makes evil his good, then that person has put himself in a state that prevents forgiveness. It is not that God refuses to forgive; it is that the person who sees good as evil and evil as good is quite unable to repent and thus to come humbly to God for forgiveness. And there is no way to forgiveness other than by the path of repentance and faith. As I have written elsewhere, "They called good evil. People in such a situation cannot repent and seek forgiveness: they lack a sense of sin; they reject God's competence to declare what is right. It is this continuing attitude that is the ultimate sin."

And links on a further proposition, and *whoever* makes it general. The offenses of which Jesus proceeds to speak are, on the surface of it, purely verbal: both refer to what the sinner says. First, there is a reference to speaking against *the Son of man* (see on 8:20), which in Jesus' teaching is a solemn way of referring to himself, but referring to himself in his messianic function (not as people in general understood messiahship, but as Jesus understood it). People may oppose him, and they may speak strong words *against* him in ignorance (cf. Acts

3:17). But there is no reason why a person who sins in this way should not later repent and find forgiveness in the way he finds forgiveness for any other sin. After all, it was not obvious to everybody that Jesus was the Son of God; it was possible for people to make a mistake about his Person.

But blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is another matter. To deny that God was at work in the exorcism that had just amazed the crowds (vv. 22–23) was inexcusable. This is more than merely verbal, more than a difference of opinion. If it were no more than a matter of words or opinions, there is no reason why it should not be forgiven following due penitence. Carr points out that the Pharisees might have had a conscientious difference from Jesus over the observance of the Sabbath, but “now they have no excuse.” They are objecting to what was obviously a good deed and ascribing it to the evil one. The context here is that of people ascribing to Satan deeds done by the Son of God in the power of the Holy Spirit. This makes it difficult to hold, as some suggest, that the sin against the Spirit is post-Pentecostal sin. Jesus is not prophesying about the future, but speaking to people who had just ascribed to Satan a marvelous work of the very Spirit of God. In that good work Jesus said that nothing less than the kingdom of God had come upon them, so that they were refusing to accept the divine rule. To call good evil in the way they did is evidence of “the lie in the soul,” a complete perversion of values. And since the Spirit is especially characteristic of the new life Christ offers, to reject that new life is to reject the divine Spirit. It is to set oneself in opposition to the very Spirit of God. People who take up such a position make themselves unforgivable; in maintaining that goodness is satanic they place themselves outside the possibility of salvation. Jesus brings out the seriousness of all this by declaring that such people will not be forgiven, *neither in this age nor in that to come*. This does not, of course, mean that some of those who are not forgiven in this world may hope for forgiveness after death. Such a possibility is not contemplated. The meaning is something like “neither in time nor eternity; never!” The blasphemy against the Spirit has eternal as well as temporal consequences. Those who commit this sin cut themselves off from forgiveness here and now and from forgiveness in eternity.

11. What is the point of the illustration of the tree and its fruit (Matthew 12:33)? What application did this have to the Pharisees (Matthew 12:34)?

Jesus sees two possibilities for trees: they may be *good* or *bad*. It is not easy to understand why the verb *make* is used; the sense appears to be something like “Suppose a tree is good, then its fruit will be good.” But *make* may be used to provoke people to action. In the context Jesus is saying that in the end there are two kinds of people. Those who are like good trees produce good fruit, whereas those who are like rotten trees produce rotten fruit. Jesus is saying that a good tree and good fruit go together, so that if the tree is sound there will be nothing wrong with the fruit. The alternative is for the tree to be *rotten*, in which case its fruit will also be *rotten*. The fruit shows what kind of tree the tree is. The pious professions of those who opposed Jesus cannot hide the fruit in their lives, fruit of hatred, intolerance, injustice, and the like. What they did showed what kind of people they were.

John the Baptist used the expression *offspring of snakes* to describe the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to his baptism (3:7). Jesus takes up the same words to bring out the venomous nature of the opposition with which he was confronted, and their oneness with those who had opposed God’s messengers in previous generations. They bewailed the opposition and frustration the prophets had encountered, blissfully unconscious of the fact

that they themselves were reproducing the same attitude toward Jesus. They are *evil* (a term Matthew has 26 times, which is exactly twice as often as the next highest use, Luke with 13), and therefore they are simply unable to say *good things* (5:45). It is with the tree and the fruit as with the fathers and their offspring. Being what they are, they can produce only rotten fruit, or follow in the steps of their impious forebears. From another angle Jesus brings out the importance of the source when he proceeds to affirm that what one says proceeds from *the abundance of the heart*. *The heart* is used here as an inclusive term to denote “the seat of physical, spiritual and mental life ... as center and source of the whole inner life, w. its thinking, feeling, and volition”. It is what the heart is full of (*abundance*) that determines what anyone says. People do not speak out of character.

12. What lesson should we learn about our hearts in relationship to our conduct (Mathew 12:35)?

In this verse *good* is used 3 times and *evil* is also used 3 times, the repetitions serving to underline the contrast. It is essentially the same point that has just been made in the previous verse, but emphasized for its importance. The *good man* is the man of inner excellence, the man whose goodness is not merely on the surface but at the center of his being. He produces *good things* from his *good treasure*. The word signifies what is valuable, but also where one keeps what is valuable. Either meaning is possible here: Jesus may be saying that it is from the things he values that the good man produces his good things, or he may mean that he gets them from his innermost storehouse, his heart. In the end there is not a great deal of difference. What the good man produces is what he values, and it comes from the center of his being. So with *the evil man*. In both cases what one brings forth proceeds from what one is at the core of one's being. *The evil man* produces *evil* just as surely as the good man produces goodness. One's deeds accord with what one is essentially. A good person does not do good sporadically or haphazardly, but habitually, and so with the evil person. Our deeds are a reflection of what we are, and they show what we really value, deep down. And, of course, we can produce from our treasure only what is there.

13. How important are the words that we speak according to Matthew 12:36-37? Explain what is meant by 'careless words'?

The words about the way speech reflects character are found only in Matthew. “*But I say to you*” puts emphasis on what follows: it draws attention to it as significant. Jesus emphasizes the importance of what people say by speaking of *every careless word* they utter. When people speak lightly without paying serious attention to what they are saying, the *careless word*, the word uttered without any thought of the effect it will have on other people, then that word shows something of what they are, deep down (objection may legitimately be made to JB's “unfounded”; Jesus is talking about words that certainly have a foundation, even though this is not realized). This makes it more significant than the person uttering it may think, and it will be taken into account on Judgment Day. Jesus is saying that in the end we must all give account of ourselves and that words we take lightly will then be seen to have meaning, for they show what we are in our innermost being.

For introduces the reason; people's words will be of the utmost significance when the judgment takes place. *Justified* means “declared to be righteous”; the verb is used in the strict sense of obtaining the verdict when brought to judgment. It is not common in the Gospels, being found twice in Matthew, 5 times in Luke, and not at all in the other Gospels. But Paul uses it 27 times, and for him it is a very important concept. It brings out the truth that our

salvation has a legal aspect and that we are saved in a manner that accords with right, not simply because God is stronger than the devil and overcomes every force of evil (though that, of course, is also true and is taught in the New Testament). We should not understand the Evangelists to be in contradiction of Paul; it is simply that they have different ways of describing what Christ has done in bringing us salvation, and the way used here is more characteristic of Paul than of Matthew. Jesus is not, of course, saying that in the end the only thing that matters will be our words, that our deeds do not matter in comparison with what we say. That is completely false. What Jesus is saying is that at the judgment what we are is what matters, and that our words, especially those to which we give no particular thought, reveal what we are. The other side of this particular coin is, of course, that where our words do not lead to our justification they lead to our condemnation (cf. Luke 19:22, "Out of your own mouth will I condemn you"; cf. Prov. 18:21). As is true throughout the New Testament, there are just two ultimate possibilities.