

SESSION 3

THE GREATEST SIN

Leader pages on pp. 110-113

THE POINT:
THE GREATEST SIN IS
NEVER TRUSTING JESUS.

MATTHEW 12:22-32

²² Then a demon-possessed man who was blind and unable to speak was brought to him. He healed him, so that the man could both speak and see.

²³ All the crowds were astounded and said, "Could this be the Son of David?"

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²⁴ When the Pharisees heard this, they said, "This man drives out demons only by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons."

²⁵ Knowing their thoughts, he told them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is headed for destruction, and no city or house divided against itself will stand.

²⁶ If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?

²⁷ And if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons drive them out? For this reason they will be your judges.

²⁸ If I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

²⁹ How can someone enter a strong man's house and steal his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can plunder his house.

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³⁰ **Anyone who is not with me is against me, and anyone who does not gather with me scatters.**

³¹ Therefore, I tell you, people will be forgiven every sin and blasphemy, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.

³² Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the one to come.

MEMORY VERSE

KEYWORDS

Demon-possessed (v. 22)—Demons are fallen angels who joined Satan in his rebellion against God. They possess limited power and like Satan have already been defeated.

Beelzebul (vv. 24,27)—This designation for Satan appears with variant spellings in the New Testament.

The Kingdom of God (v. 28)—The expression the kingdom of God designates God's sovereign or kingly rule.

Blasphemy . . . Spirit (vv. 31-32)—Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is the willful and permanent rejection of Jesus.

WHY IS JESUS WORTHY OF OUR TRUST?

What do the following people have in common: F. Lee Bailey, Richard “Alex” Murdaugh, Edward Snowden, Benedict Arnold, Pete Rose, Shoeless Joe Jackson, Tim Donaghy, Donald Sterling, and Ben Affleck?

The quick answer is, in one way or another, they are all controversial figures. This list includes lawyers, political figures, athletes, an NBA owner, a referee, a military hero, and even an actor. So, what do these individuals have in common beyond being controversial?

They have all, in one way or another, violated societal trust in ways that led to lifetime bans for their actions. The lawyers were disbarred for unethical practice, the athletes for gambling, the political and military figures for treason, and, yes, Ben Affleck received a lifetime ban from certain casinos for card counting while playing blackjack. Perhaps society may one day change its opinion and forgive them.

Not so with the sin Jesus described in the passage we’ll study today. Jesus addressed an astounded crowd, who had just witnessed Him miraculously cleanse a demon-possessed man. This dramatic event led to a broader conversation about sin, and one particular sin that would spark theological

debate for centuries to come. What sin could be so horrible that God would not forgive it?

We Trust His Power //

Matthew 12:22-23

Jesus had created quite a stir. The response to His teaching and miracles polarized the crowds gathered. There was heightened tension with the Pharisees because of Jesus’s growing popularity with the people. So far in Matthew 12, Jesus allowed His disciples to pick and eat grain on the Sabbath, attended synagogue services, healed a man’s withered hand in front of the Pharisees, and withdrew from the angry Pharisees and healed many from a large crowd that followed Him.

The opening word “then” implies all these events happened near each other. So, it would be safe to say that the historical account in today’s passage also happened on the same day, which again is the Sabbath.

A demon-possessed man was brought to Jesus. Not only was the man demon-possessed, but he was also blind and unable to talk. This was a miserable plight. Since he was blind, he was unable to help himself or to go find help. Also, since he



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couldn't speak, he was unable to ask for help.

Which came first, the demon possession or the physical ailments? We don't know, but we do know that Satan's purpose is to keep people from seeing and speaking of God. C. H. Spurgeon said this of the man, "An extraordinary case exhibited a novel form of the handicraft of Satan.

The evil spirit had secured himself by stopping up the windows and the door of the soul."⁶ Another way to look at it is that Satan blinded his eyes so he couldn't see Jesus and sealed his lips from calling out to Jesus for help.

Matthew didn't give many details as to the healing itself. Did Jesus touch him? Did He pray over him? Did Jesus command the demon to leave as He had on other occasions? The only description of the event is simply, "He healed him" (v. 22). In this section of his book, Matthew sets up several contrasts.

- **The malice of Satan and the mercy of Jesus.** Satan's minions were doing everything in their power to keep the man from experiencing the healing touch of Jesus, who saw the man's plight and had compassion and mercy on him.
- **God's mighty power and Satan's limited power.** The powers of evil were able to shut the man's eyes and mouth, but one act of Jesus freed the man from the evil chains that held him.
- **The love of the people and the loathing of the Pharisees.** Even though in these two verses we don't see the Pharisees' reaction, it has already been described earlier in the chapter (v. 14).

One word or touch from Jesus immediately broke the chains with which Satan had bound the man. At one moment, he couldn't see or ask for help, but after encountering Jesus, the man was fully restored and could praise the God of heaven.

The crowds were astounded. Matthew used the plural when talking about the crowds, referring to the segmented groups of people gathered. It could have been crowds from different locations or regions. The Pharisees were certainly one of the groups. All the different crowds were astounded for one reason or another.

WHEN HAVE YOU BEEN ASTOUNDED BY A DISPLAY OF GOD'S POWER?

The question began rumbling through the crowd, "Could this be the Son of David?" (v. 23). The term "Son of David" is a messianic title. Many times the Old Testament speaks of the one from David's line who will establish God's kingdom forever (Isa. 11:1).



DIGGING DEEPER JESUS STANDS WHEN SYSTEMS FAIL

Jesus healed the demon-possessed man right after he withdrew himself from the synagogue because of the Pharisees. In order to explain Jesus's actions, Matthew supplies us with a quotation from Isaiah 42:1-4 (Matt 12:15-21), the focal passage for session one of this study. One of the keywords in Isaiah 42 is justice (*mishpawt*), and Jesus will one day extend God's justice to the ends of the earth. However, until then, we should seek to imitate Jesus and provide individual justice to those within our sphere of influence. This is exactly what Jesus does with the demon-possessed man. The disciples of the Pharisees were either unable or unwilling to cast the demon out of this man. The physicians were unable to restore this man back to perfect health. The system failed him at all points, but Jesus did not. Similarly, we should help others experience God's justice when our modern systems fail.

How might we help those who can't see their sin and call out to Jesus because they are gripped by the powers of this world?



We Trust His Presence //

Matthew 12:24-29

This encounter is in the middle of a section of Scripture, where Matthew was highlighting the growing opposition among the Pharisees to Jesus's ministry. The resistance to Jesus among the religious elite rose in conjunction to His popularity among the people. The more the people loved Jesus, the more the Pharisees loathed Him.

The crowds were astounded that the man was able to speak and hear immediately. They began to question if Jesus could be the Son of David. Apparently, they asked loud enough that the Pharisees were able to hear. With each miracle Jesus performed and each message He taught, the Pharisees witnessed their esteemed place in the hearts of people slipping.

With a contemptuous attitude and disdain in their voices, the Pharisees called Jesus "this man" (v. 24). They insulted Jesus by not calling Him by His name. The phrase itself is contemptuous and distasteful. Their waning popularity in the hearts of the people brought the Pharisees to the point where they just wouldn't even utter Jesus's name.

The validity of the miracle couldn't be doubted. Every person in the crowd witnessed the demon flee, as sight and speech walked back into the man's world. The healing and release couldn't be denied. The Pharisees' response to the question reveals their desperation. In essence, the best

argument they could come up with was, "This man, whose name we won't even let pass through our lips, does all of this by the power of Beelzebul."

Beelzebul is mentioned throughout Scripture. While the specific meaning these Pharisees had in mind in invoking the name of Beelzebul is unclear, one thing is certain: it was a vile insult and displayed the utter contempt they had for Him. Jesus unraveled their flawed logic with three truths:

1. **A divided kingdom will not stand.**
2. **The Pharisees had a double standard.**
3. **The kingdom of God has arrived.**

Jesus said that one could only enter a strongman's house and steal, by first entering and binding him. The world was Satan's domain. Jesus let everyone know He was present to bind the strongman and take back what the enemy had stolen. Jesus is the ultimate victor with the power over sin and darkness to bring people light and life.

WHAT DOES THIS PASSAGE HAVE TO SAY ABOUT GOD'S NATURE AND CHARACTER?

We Trust His Truth //

Matthew 12:30-32

With the Pharisees in His gaze, Jesus announced that when it comes to the battle against evil, there is no Switzerland. There's no middle way. He minced no words, made it plain and clear, drew a line in the sand, and pulled no punches. He landed a strong left hook to the Pharisees. There is no neutrality in this war against Satan's strongholds; you are either with Jesus or you are against Him.

Jesus's next words may have created as much angst, worry, discussion, study, and reflection as any He uttered. His first ones are great news for each of us. He assured the crowd every sin and blasphemy committed against the Son of Man would be forgiven. Jesus let us know that His grace is greater than all our sin.

What is sin? Sin is anything that we actively (commission) or passively (omission) do that misses the mark of God's standard.

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Consider two types of sin that plague the lives of many Christians:

Inherited sin. We inherit this sin nature from Adam. It has been passed down through the generations all the way back to Adam and Eve. We are born with an inclination to sin.

Personal sin. This is our personal choice to rebel against God. Each one of us chooses to rebel against God just as Adam and Eve did.

Blasphemy is more than just saying something bad about God. In the Old Testament, it carries the idea of cursing, reviling, or despising. It's to call into question God's personal integrity and holiness.

According to Jesus, the Holy Spirit's role is to convict people of their sin and lead them to Jesus (John 16:8). This sin of blasphemy is not only saying something bad about the Holy Spirit, but it is a persistent rejection of the convicting work of the Spirit, whose job it is to expose our sin and lead us to embrace Jesus as Savior and follow Him.

Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit keeps someone from trusting that Jesus's grace is greater than all our sin, so they are left in their trespasses and sins, and separated from God forever.

WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF WILLFUL AND PERSISTENT UNBELIEF?

DID YOU KNOW?

Every event or action must be interpreted. Jesus's healing of the demon-possessed man received contrasting responses. The people understood that the "Son of David" was being revealed. However, the Pharisees connected Jesus to the "prince of demons." How might we deal with modern events that could be viewed similarly? We should interpret them through two main lenses: 1) the consistency of God's nature, and 2) the motives of the people involved. These two lenses are often combined in Scripture because God's nature is connected to His mission and people either act in alignment with or against His mission. Jesus was born to be the "Son of David" and throughout Matthew, we can see references to how Jesus fulfilled this title (Matt 1:1,20; 9:27). In contrast, the Pharisees's motives did not align with God's mission, because they failed to see how God's actions should have affected them.

Biblical Truth: As believers, our mission must align with the mission of God.

How does your life's mission align with God's mission?

LIVE IT

Can we really trust Jesus to take care of all our sins?

The answer is yes. One of the reasons is because we have no other hope. Another reason is because of Jesus's determination. God could have reversed our situation and only died so that we could get into heaven and then spend the rest of eternity paying off our debt. Instead, God chose to give us something we could never afford. Still, the greatest sin is never trusting Jesus. Use the following ideas to help you move forward with placing your complete trust in Jesus.

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- **Get off the unpardoned list.** Have you resisted the Holy Spirit drawing you to Jesus? Jesus is the way to heaven. Embrace the forgiveness of sin provided for by the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Turn to the insider front cover of this book for help or talk to your group leader.
- **Give up the critical attitude.** It's so easy to possess a critical spirit, just like the Pharisees. Sit quietly and ask God to examine your heart for a critical spirit. Is there a sin for which you need to repent or a person with whom you need to reconcile?
- **Have your lips freed.** Jesus freed the demon-possessed man's lips, so he could give God the glory. Who do you need to talk with about what Jesus has done in your life? Schedule a time to meet with this person and share what Jesus can do.

DAILY READINGS

1. STRONG FOUNDATION // 1 CORINTHIANS 3:10-11

A faulty foundation on a home is costly and dangerous. A weak foundation can cause any home to deteriorate without the resident knowing. Spiritually, a faulty foundation can be just as dangerous. A shaky trust in God affects what we say, how we act, and how we think. As followers of Christ, we must believe that He has the power to do "more than we could ask or think" (Eph. 3:20). This belief grounds our trust in Christ, verifying that we can put our full hope and confidence in Him. The Lord promises that people who "trust in the Lord will renew their strength" (Isa. 40:31). Choosing to trust God lays a solid spiritual foundation for the believer.

Take some time today to inspect your foundation.

2. FREEDOM FUELED TRUST // MATTHEW 12:22-25

In Matthew 12:22-25, Jesus defends His power to people who refuse to believe. Like Jesus, as His followers, we face opposition to our faith through slander and mockery of our belief in God, His Power, and the mission to make disciples. We must defend our beliefs in a world that equates indulging one's flesh to freedom. This worldly vision of freedom often leads to exhaustion from attempting to control every single aspect of one's life. But believers know of a true freedom defined by our trust in God. Through the freedom we have in Christ, we can trust in Him and His truths.

Lord, help me to rest on your truth and put my trust in You.

3. TRUSTING IN DISAPPOINTMENT // PSALM 34:17-19

My class of 9th graders often say, "Life be 'Life'n". This phrase emphasizes the pains of heartbreak, death, sickness, and all other discomforts accompanying living. Over time, a prolonged period of discomfort causes one to lose hope out of fear of being disappointed by the "negative"

aspects of life. A hopeless disposition causes a believer to wrestle with their faith, leaving them with an unwillingness to trust anyone or anything. When we are in the face of disappointment, we must rely on God's character. We can be reminded of this through studying the Word and spending time with Him in prayer. This builds our trust in Him and helps us overcome disappointment.

When you trust in God even disappointment doesn't stand a chance.

4. A TRUST THAT SAVES // ISAIAH 12:1-3

Salvation is God's gift that grants us eternal life. When we come to Christ with repentant hearts and open minds, we are ready to accept the divinity of Christ and our mortality. We also accept His promises and authority over us and every aspect of our lives. Acknowledging this gives the believer confidence to come to Christ for salvation. This is a never-ending cycle of faith-building, starting with affirming God's authority in our lives, expanding our knowledge of Him, and finally extending our trust in Him. Salvation and trust in God are intertwined, meaning you can't have one without the other.

I can put my trust in God, building on the trust I put in His gift of salvation.

5. A REPENTANT HEART // PSALMS 51:1-19

After committing several transgressions and being rebuked by the prophet Nathan, King David looks inward and repents to God. He asks God to "create a clean heart for me and renew a steadfast spirit in me" (v. 10). David illustrates in this passage is the humbling and intimate effort of repentance. We all "fall short," and when we do, it is our responsibility to repent. However, after we've been forgiven, repentance requires that we completely turn away from sin. Believers must deliberately choose God over our flesh because doing so declares to the world that Christ is our Lord and Savior.

Like David, we can demonstrate humility when we fall short with repentant hearts.



Living in Truth

BY DR. DOROTHEA JOHNSON JAMES

Have you ever found yourself in a situation where everything seemed to fall apart, yet you found strength in something solid and unwavering? This reality hit home for me during a cookout that had been planned amid torrential rains. As the guests arrived and began to sit in the chairs, they sank in the mud. My friends and family dealt with sinking chairs, leaning precariously as the ground struggled to hold their weight. It was a small yet noticeable reminder of the importance of a firm foundation.

That day, I was reminded of an article I read when Hurricane Katrina destroyed the Gulf Coast. Yet, in Pass Christian, Mississippi, one house stood amidst the rubble. The question the citizens were left with was, what allowed this structure to withstand the storm? Dare I say a firm, indestructible foundation. A firm foundation just like the one Jesus teaches His disciples about in Matthew 7:24-27.

This parable illustrates a life built on the unshakable foundation of God's Word, which can weather any storm.

What is Truth? Truth is deeply rooted in the character and nature of God. Jesus declares in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." This statement clarifies that truth is not just an abstract idea; it is embodied in Jesus, serving as the ultimate standard for all things. Jesus is the Word.

In his book *Jesus Among Other Gods*, Ravi Zacharias says, "In calling Christ the Word, John anchors him as the eternal self-expression of God, the source of all creation, and the bridge between divine revelation and human understanding."⁷

- **Truth is Absolute and Unchanging:** Psalm 119:89, "LORD, your word is forever; it is firmly fixed in heaven."

- **Truth is the Architect of Spiritual Growth:** John 17:17, “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.”
- **Truth is our Advisor in Chaos:** 2 Timothy 3:16, “All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness.”

Core Truths of the Word

Living in Truth Will Uncover Man's Greatest Problem

Romans 3:23 states, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Humanity’s most significant problem is sin. This fact causes separation from God as identified in the Word. Recognizing sinfulness is essential. The Bible exposes sin and guides us to God’s grace and redemption.

Living in Truth Will Reveal God's Gift

John 3:16 reveals the ultimate solution to sin: “For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.” Salvation is offered to all, making it the greatest gift ever given. Martin Luther stated, “The Bible is the cradle wherein Christ is laid,”⁸ stressing that every page of Scripture points to the truth of Jesus.

Living in Truth is the Ultimate Standard

Living in truth requires aligning one’s life with God’s Word. Psalm 119:105 states, “Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light on my path.” God’s Word illuminates darkness and provides clarity for every decision. The Word challenges us, causing us to reflect on God’s character rather than conform to the world’s faulty value systems.

Living in Truth is Our Testimony to Others

James 2:17 asserts, “In the same way faith if it does not have works, is dead by itself.” As we practice the truth every day, our actions will demonstrate the depth of our faith. A lifestyle aligned with God’s truth honors Him and serves as a testimony to those around us.

Living in Truth: Practical Applications

Living in God’s truth involves more than mental understanding or lip service; it requires a commitment to embody His principles. Here are two practical ways to live in truth:

1. Model Your Life After Scripture:

- Let Scripture Guide Your Decisions (Prov. 3:5-6).
- Seek Wisdom in Uncertainty (Jas. 1:5).

2. Manifest Your Beliefs Through Actions:

- Choose Obedience Over Conformity (Dan. 1:8-16).
- Serve Others in Practical Ways (1 John 3:18).
- Respond to Conflict with Grace (Matt. 5:9).

In a world where people believe in their own “truths,” believers are called to stand firm in God’s unchanging Word. God’s truth brings freedom, clarity, and purpose (John 8:32). We will counter-cultural confusion by renewing our minds (Rom. 12:2). Although we live in uncertainty and chaos, we have a firm foundation in the truth. Whether it’s a house standing firm against a hurricane or a life built on the truth of God’s Word, the principle remains the same: a solid foundation is the key to Living in Truth and enduring life’s storms.

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Week 3 – God’s Covenant People

Scripture Readings: Genesis 12:1–9; Genesis 15; Exodus 19:1–6; Deuteronomy 7:6–9

God chose Abraham and made a covenant with him: his descendants would become a great nation, live in the land God promised, and bless all nations. Israel was not chosen for privilege alone but for purpose—to reveal God to the world. Through covenants with Abraham, Moses, and David, God demonstrated His faithfulness. Each covenant carried forward His plan until the ultimate covenant through Christ. Israel’s story shows God’s patience, mercy, and justice.