>>>>>>> Matthew – Lesson 31 <<<<<<<

1) This next incident is similar to what we studied back in Matthew 9:32–34.
   a) However, this time Jesus replies to the Pharisees rather than saying nothing as he did earlier.

Matthew 12:22–32 (ESV)
Blasphemy Against the Holy Spirit

22 Then a demon-oppressed man who was blind and mute was brought to him, and
he healed him, so that the man spoke and saw. 23 And all the people were amazed,
and said, "Can this be the Son of David?" 24 But when the Pharisees heard it, they
said, "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons."
25 Knowing their thoughts, he said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is
laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. 26 And if Satan casts
out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? 27 And if
I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore
they will be your judges. 28 But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons,
then the kingdom of God has come upon you. 29 Or how can someone enter a strong
man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then
indeed he may plunder his house. 30 Whoever is not with me is against me, and
whoever does not gather with me scatters. 31 Therefore I tell you, every sin and
blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be
forgiven. 32 And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but
whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in
the age to come.

2) Here, the man who is brought to Jesus is both mute and blind because of the demon possession.
   a) It is to be noted that here, and in the similar passage in Mat 9:32 that the ESV uses the term demon-oppressed instead of demon-possessed for the same Greek word.
      i) According to the ESV translation notes etc. the indication is that this is something less than a full possession (control) of the individual.
      ii) It is further interesting to me, that in the 9:32 passage, Matthew says the demon was cast out.
      iii) Here, however, he simply says the man was healed.
      iv) There is obviously something different between the two.
      v) It is equally obvious that here, even though Matthew does not say the demon was cast out, he does indicate that the Pharisees think that it was.
         (1) Jesus does not contradict them but in fact, he shows agreement by what he says:

28 But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

3) As in the other incident back in chapter 9, we clearly see the reactions.

a) The crowd was amazed and were seeing the possibility of the Messianic prophecies being fulfilled.

b) On the other hand, the Pharisees were not so impressed and, in their minds, (and perhaps out loud as well) were trying to discredit him.

"It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons."

4) Whether Jesus heard them or not, he definitely knew their thoughts and he challenges them out loud with factual and logical arguments.

   a) A kingdom divided against itself cannot stand.

   b) It is illogical to say that Satan would cast out one of his own. If he did then his kingdom could not stand.

      i) The question also arises why Satan would do such a healing miracle.

   c) Jesus also puts forth an argument that it is naturally a stronger man (Christ himself) who first ties up the strong man (Satan).

      i) It must therefore be someone stronger than Beelzebul who is able to deliver from such demonic oppression.

   d) And, oh by the way, this leaves the other alternative Jesus says – I am the Son of David and that means the kingdom of God has come!

5) Then in 30 and following, he becomes very specific about what that rejection means.

   a) If you are not with me, you are against me.

   b) And if that were not bad enough, your accusation constitutes an unpardonable sin!

6) We have to look at this closely to get it.

   a) This group of Pharisees thought they were speaking against Jesus – he casts out demons by the prince of demons.

   b) However, in truth, their accusation was against the very Spirit of God – the Holy Spirit.

   c) Jesus states clearly that if they spoke against Jesus himself, it was forgivable but to speak against the Holy Spirit was not forgivable!

7) Continuing, Jesus says …

Matthew 12:33–34 (ESV)

A Tree Is Known by Its Fruit

33 "Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. **34** You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

8) Jesus has said – it is not what goes into a man that corrupts but what comes out.

9) These passages, 33-34 and 35-37 are an expansion of that in light of what had just occurred and what these Pharisees had said.

10) He begins with good trees verses bad trees – there is no way to skirt the facts of what he is laying out here – good trees / good fruit – bad trees / bad fruit!

11) Then to further leave no doubt as to what he's saying, he calls this group of Pharisees vipers.

a) And, simply asks a question "How can you speak good when you are evil?"

b) So, they are condemned by their words and Jesus concludes by making it clear that it is their hearts that is really the problem.

1) In these next verses, Jesus moves away from the condemnation of these Pharisees and really gives his listeners words to live by…

Matthew 12:35–37 (ESV)

35 The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person
out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. 36 I tell you, on the day of judgment people
will give account for every careless word they speak, 37 for by your words you will
be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

2) He begins here with a metaphor for heart – treasure.

a) Good hearts bring forth good and evil hearts bring forth evil.

b) In today's world this appears (to me) to be more evident than it has been in a very long time.

3) Jesus goes on in verse 36 clearly stating that every careless word will condemn at judgement.

4) "Careless" means inactive, idle, worthless, and perhaps even harmful.

a) Here it refers to words that we should not consider insignificant or innocuous.

b) It is not mindless small talk or carefree jokes, but broken promises, unkept commitments, and unpaid vows.

c) I would suggest further that these words may also be angry bitter words aimed at hurting someone.

d) Such words are better indicators of a person's true character than his or her carefully planned and prepared statements and speeches.

What are some situations you can see yourself in that might cause you to say careless words?

1) The conversation with the Pharisees and some added scribes continue …

Matthew 12:38-42 (ESV)

The Sign of Jonah

38 Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, "Teacher, we wish
to see a sign from you." 39 But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation
seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.
40 For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so
will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. 41 The
men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it,
for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than
Jonah is here. 42 The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this
generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the
wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.

2) Evidently, some scribes have also entered into this conversation and they along with the Pharisees want a sign.
   a) First, we should answer the question why they were asking the question.
   b) It would appear to be obvious that they were not seeking to believe in Jesus as the Messiah – they were simply wanting him to prove that what he just did and has said would be legitimate.
   c) Jesus knew they had already seen enough miraculous proof to convince them that he was the Messiah if they would just open their hearts[33]
3) Jesus does not let up – he calls them an evil and adulterous generation and tells them to forget it; he will not play their game.
4) I know we all occasionally joke about wishing we could get an email letting us know what God desires for us to do but … (honest answer)

Do we ever find ourselves wanting or wishing for a sign – just some little something as a proof of God's existence?

If we have in the past, what do you think changed?

5) Jesus continues his inditement of this group in verses 41-42.
   a) First the men of Nineveh will rise up to condemn them.

Why are the men of Nineveh in particular an inditement of these Pharisees and scribes?

   b) Jonah preached to them and they repented yet the Christ, the Son of God himself stands before these men and they will not repent!
6) Next, he brings up the queen of the South who also rise up and condemn them.
   a) The Queen of Sheba had traveled from southern Arabia to see Solomon, king of Israel.
      i) She wanted to learn about his great wisdom (1 Kings 10:1–10).
   b) She recognized the truth about God when it was presented to her, unlike the Jewish religious leaders who refused the truth even though it was staring them in the face.[34]
   c) So, she will also be qualified to judge this bunch at the judgement!
7) To make this inditement even more pointed, we must consider that both the people of Nineveh and the Queen of Sheba – were gentiles.
   a) Recall Jesus' encounter in the synagogue when he said the scripture had been fulfilled in their hearing.
      i) In the discourse afterward he pointed out the healing of Naman, and the Elijah helping the widow of Zarephath.
      ii) The result was they took him out and attempted to throw him over a cliff.
   b) Obviously here a not so drastic result but the point was made, nonetheless.

[33] Bruce B. Barton, *Matthew*, Life Application Bible Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1996), 248.

[34] Bruce B. Barton, *Matthew*, Life Application Bible Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1996), 250.

1) Jesus continues with a parable …

Matthew 12:43-45 (ESV)
Return of an Unclean Spirit

43 "When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, but finds none. **44** Then it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when it comes, it finds the house empty, swept, and put in order. **45** Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there, and the last state of that person is worse than the first. So also will it be with this evil generation."

2) This passage is to further describe how it will be with the evil generation he just talking about.
3) Jesus tells this parable focusing on the attitude of the nation of Israel and the religious leaders in particular.
4) The bottom line is you cannot be neutral about Jesus.
5) Unfilled and complacent people are easy targets for Satan, as Jesus described in this parable.
6) According to Bruce Barton, this parable cannot be used to describe actual situations with demons. He says:

We cannot press the details of the parable as teaching doctrinal truth about demons (for example, the picture that demons liked to live in the desert was based on popular belief, not biblical fact). Jesus may have been only using popular beliefs in this parable to make his point.

The unclean spirit was not "cast out" but for some reason had *gone out of a person.* The desert *(waterless regions)* was believed to be the habitation of demons. Because demons need *a resting place* (that is, someone or something living that they can enter and torment), this demon returned to its former *house* when it could find nothing suitable in the desert. This sentence is probably conditional: "if" the demon decided to return. Demons do not always repossess people after they leave or are cast out. That would make exorcisms both worthless and an invitation to greater disaster (12:45). Jesus was making a point about the spiritual destiny of his listeners.[35]

7) The point of Jesus' teaching here is not about the demons but the house, and in particular, the condition of the house.
8) The nation should have been "swept clean" by the teaching and preaching of John the Baptist and of Jesus himself.
   a) Many had come to repent.
   b) But if the nation did not turn around, truly repenting from sin and turning to Jesus as their Messiah and Savior, they would be no better off than a clean but empty house.
   c) To fill the house properly they must believe and repent of the sin of rejection.

[35] Bruce B. Barton, *Matthew*, Life Application Bible Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1996), 251.

d) If not, the clean house is an invitation for the return of the demon and the seven others with him.

e) As Barton concludes:

God's people, privileged with prophecy and promises, would be faced with horrible judgment for rejecting their Messiah.[36]

9) Who are my brothers and mother? …

Matthew 12:46-50 (ESV)

Jesus' Mother and Brothers

46 While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him. **48** But he replied to the man who told him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" **49** And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! **50** For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

10) The first thing we must do here is put to rest any idea that Jesus is disrespecting his family.

a) These two questions: "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" were not meant as disrespect toward his family members.

b) As the sinless Messiah, he certainly fulfilled the command to honor his father and mother.

11) Instead, this becomes a teaching moment.

12) Jesus wants to make the simple point that there are others who qualify as brothers, sisters, and even a mother – those who … "do the will of my Father in heaven."

[36] Bruce B. Barton, *Matthew*, Life Application Bible Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1996), 251.