

Matthew

Sermon on the Mount

February 09, 2025

I. Introduction

- A. We have been working our way through **Matthew 12:1-45**. In these verses, there are four stories that expose the methods used by the scribes and Pharisees to carry out their evil intentions towards Jesus. And these verses also show us how the meek and humble Jesus dealt with them.
 - 1. The **first two** stories dealt with keeping the Sabbath law. Between the second and third stories there is a prophecy from **Isaiah 42** that prophesies the Messiah would be meek and humble in heart.
 - 2. The **third** story deals with the blasphemy of saying that something good God is doing is actually being done by the devil. And the **fourth** story is about people wanting Jesus to prove He has been sent from God by having Him perform a sign of their choosing. Today, we will finish the third story and see what we can learn from the fourth.
- B. Pray

II. Conclusion of third story

- A. **Matthew 12:33-37**, “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, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. [35] The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil. [36] But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. [37] For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”
- B. In responding to being told He was casting out demons by the power of the devil, Jesus said, “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.”
 - 1. The basic idea is: if a person is good, do not call him bad. If he is doing good, do not call what he is doing bad. If a person is bad, do not call him good. And if he is doing bad, do not call it good.
 - 2. Every good thing a person does, every good character quality a person has, and every good intention are to be recognized as good.
 - 3. If a person does things that are selfish and sinful, and in so doing exposes unloving and ungodly character qualities and his bad intentions, those things are to be called bad.

4. But how can we know what is good or bad in a person, or in what the person does? By examining the outcome or effect on others of what is said and done. For example, who does it help, or who does it hurt? Is it loving or unloving, kind or unkind, thoughtful or careless?
 5. The point is, we are to be realistic and honest about a person, or a group, or an organization, or even a situation. Why? Because God looked beyond our sinfulness to see if there was something good, something worth redeeming – and He decided there was. Therefore, like Him, we are to have an honest, balanced perspective that is reasonable, fair, unbiased, hopeful, and therefore, godly.
 - a. This godly perspective doesn't exaggerate the bad or the good. It doesn't bend the truth to make favorites look better than they are, or make those we don't favor look worse than they are.
 - b. In other words, we are to judge according to truth, not according to our feelings or biases or preconceived notions or pressure from others to conform to their point of view.
 6. The Pharisees abandoned this fair-minded, godly perspective and spoke evil of Jesus because He stood in the way of what they wanted, and believed they deserved.
 - a. In twisting the truth to fit their self-serving point of view, they fed pride, ill-will, contempt, animosity, and eventually an open hostility that led to murdering an innocent man.
 - b. But they not only hurt their own character in these ways, they led astray and hurt the character of those who followed them. And beyond that, they increased the hardness of their hearts against what God was saying and doing through Jesus.
 7. You may never progress to open hostility and murder, but you will feed such things as pride, ill-will, and contempt when you allow a person's bad behavior to blind you to whatever good may be in them or done by them.
- C. Jesus went on to say, "You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. [35] The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil."
1. When people feel free to say whatever they want, or when they are venting, or expressing deeply felt feelings, or are driven by a strong sense of need, or are passionate about something, or angry, or drunk, they tend to forget to guard their tongue, and that is when they say what is in their heart. Why? Because in those moments the heart sees no reason to speak anything other than what is there.

2. This is true, not just for that brood of vipers we know as the Pharisees, it is also true for you and for me.
 3. We all know how to guard our tongue and say what we must to get what we want or look better than we are. And yet, even then, what we are guardedly saying reveals who we are – for in those moments we are choosing to pretend we are what we aren't. And this is a form of hypocrisy – a hypocrisy that resides deep within.
 4. The reality is, if love, compassion, kindness, humility, tenderness, and patience are alive and growing within us, if truth and justice and keeping a balanced perspective are alive and growing within us, if we have a heartfelt gratitude for God's kindness in spite of what we deserve, if we are committed to putting good into a relationship or a situation regardless of what we receive, if we want our life to give others a reason to glorify God, **then** those deeply-held beliefs and values and qualities of character will powerfully influence **how** we talk, **when** we talk, and **what** we say.
 5. It is for this reason that Jesus says, "the good person brings out of his good treasure (*heart-values/beliefs*) what is good; and the evil person brings out of his evil treasure (*values/beliefs*) what is evil."
 - a. Because these words are true, we can conclude that the Pharisees' blasphemy was intentional – for it came from their heart where they hold their treasured beliefs and values.
 - b. And though we may try to justify having said something we should not have said by claiming it was said in anger or out of hurt or from frustration, it does not change the fact that what we said came from values and beliefs we hold dear, and which in the moment made it seem sensible or okay to say what we said.
 6. What do your unguarded moments say about what is in your heart? If you don't know, but want to know, then listen to yourself. Listen to how you sound – to your tone of voice and your choice of words. Listen as if you are the other person – for then you are more likely to understand how they hear what you are saying.
 7. One final thought: what is in your heart either opens you up to God and His truth or closes your mind and heart, in whole or in part, to God and His truth. This is as true for you as it is for those you are seeking to help and influence for good and for God. Therefore, don't let discouragement stop your efforts before putting forth enough effort to discern how open a person is.
- D. [36] But I tell you that every careless word (*worthless, useless for bringing about good*) that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the

day of judgment. [37] For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.

1. Because our careless, unguarded words reveal what is in our heart and therefore reflect who we really are, we will be judged by our words just as we will be judged by our deeds. The reality is, our words, whether thoughtful and careful, or careless and unguarded, reveal what we believe, value, fear, and hope, while our unguarded deeds give visible proof to what is in our heart.
 - a. Of course, we are capable of very rational, sensible speaking, and meaningful conversation – as proven when we are trying to please someone or impress them or get something we want.
 - b. However, when talking about people or issues that stir our feelings, our emotions, our felt-needs, and the like – such as being loved or politics or religion or God or money or our spouse or our children or our boss – we reveal in our tone of voice and choice of words what we really think and how we really feel.
 2. So once again, when you are free, or think you are free to say whatever you want, when you fear no reprisals or loss of anything you don't want to lose – your tone of voice and choice of words will expose your true feelings, thoughts, fears, and hopes – which is why God says He will judge you by your words just as He will judge you by your deeds.
 3. And as I have already said, if you want to know what is in your heart, listen to your words – especially when in your own home, or in the heat of conflict, or when defending yourself from criticism, or when telling someone near or dear how they hurt you or failed you or made your life more difficult, or when talking about long-held resentment, or when talking about topics where you strongly disagree with the other person's point of view.
- E. Now you might be thinking that in calling the Pharisees a brood of vipers, Jesus was speaking carelessly and should be judged as such.
1. These verses about our words are not for the purpose of limiting us to words of praise or comfort or that build the other person up. These verses are about speaking the truth.
 2. And when speaking the truth, we are to call good good, and bad bad within the framework of a reasonable, fair, and unbiased perspective.
 3. Therefore, depending on the person or situation, we are to speak the truth in a strong, clear, straight-forward way – as Jesus did in calling the religious leaders a brood of vipers. However, there are times and situations where we ought to speak with a gentle clarity that does not compromise the truth – as Jesus did with Martha (**Luke 10:41**).

III. Fourth story – wanting to decide what proof would cause you to believe (which it wouldn't because if the proof available is not enough, nothing will be).

A. **Matthew 12:38-45**, Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to [Jesus], “Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.” [39] But He answered and said to them, “An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; [40] for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. [41] The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. [42] The Queen of the South will rise up with this generation at the judgment and will condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here. [43] Now when the unclean spirit goes out of a man (*a full-circle return by Jesus to His casting out the demon*), it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and does not find it. [44] Then it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came’; and when it comes, it finds it unoccupied, swept, and put in order. [45] Then it goes and takes along with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. That is the way it will also be with this evil generation.”

B. The evil and adulterous generation spoken of here not only heard Jesus' teaching, they witnessed His miracles of healing, raising the dead, feeding 5000+ people, and casting out demons. They had already seen enough proof to convince them to believe in Jesus and live accordingly. Yet not only did they not believe, they were saying that if Jesus would just perform a sign of their choosing, they would finally be convinced and believe.

1. I suspect the essence of Abraham's answer to the rich man when asked to send Lazarus back to warn his brothers to change their ways, would also fit here: If they were not paying heed to Moses and the prophets (OT), and if the miracles Christ had performed already were not enough, then even if Jesus performed a miracle of their choosing, they would still not be persuaded (**Luke 16:27-31**).
2. Besides, the Ninevites only needed to hear Jonah's preaching, and the Queen of Sheba only needed to hear about the wisdom of Solomon. Therefore, the people of Jesus' day (*and in our day*) have no excuse for not responding in faith and living accordingly because they have a much greater revelation of God's presence and power in and through Jesus and godly Christians.

- C. Finally, Jesus likens the hard-hearted scribes, Pharisees, and general Jewish population to a person who has been cleansed from an evil spirit (*possibly, cleansed from idol worship and the evils associated with it*). However, evil needs a person or group of people to carry out its desires. Therefore, upon realizing the one from whom the evil had been driven out of had an empty heart because he had not filled his heart, mind, choices, and behavior with godliness, it moves back in – but not alone, it brings seven evils worse than itself and all eight inhabit the person.
1. There are several truths here for our consideration, but today I want to emphasize just one. The only reason we turn toward selfishness and sin, and the only reason we hold on to certain forms of selfishness and sin is because they meet a sense of need or satisfy a desire or longing – and most often more quickly and in different ways than godliness meets the need or satisfies the desire.
 2. This is why growth in godliness is a two-sided process of putting off what is ungodly and putting on or filling that empty spot with what is godly.
 3. You cannot put godliness on without removing the ungodliness that is there. For example, you cannot become patient by plastering patience over impatience. Godly patience can only replace impatience as the impatience is removed and patience put in its place.
 4. On the other hand, to put off without putting on leaves you vulnerable to the reasons you chose ungodliness in some form or another in the first place. For example, to remove impatience without replacing it with patience leaves you vulnerable to the feelings, emotions, impulses, and ways of thinking that drove your impatience.
 5. Therefore, if you do not deal with those feelings, emotions, impulses, and ways of thinking by putting God and godliness in their place, they will drive you to gratify them the way you once did – and you will return to being just as bad or worse than you were before putting impatience out.
 6. The way out of your selfishness and sinfulness is through Jesus Christ, and by means of putting off what is ungodly and putting godliness in its place. Anything else will leave you as you are, or lead to you being worse than you were.

IV. Conclusion

- A. Good and evil, godliness and ungodliness are a result of who we are on the inside – what we believe, value, fear, and hope. To become Christ-like, to love as we ought, to be holy as God is holy, to grow in the faith, and to mature as a Christian, we must deal with the outside and the inside.