

# Can the Church Cope with the Real Jesus

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[ 0 : 00 ] But for now, we're going to turn to our reading this morning, and we're continuing in our series in Matthew's Gospel. So please do turn to Matthew chapter 12, and we're reading the whole chapter this morning.

Matthew chapter 12, and I'll read that for us. I'll give you a second to find that in your Bibles, and then we'll read this together. Matthew chapter 12, and reading from verse 1.

At that time, Jesus went through the grain fields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat.

But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath. He said to them, He went on from there and entered their synagogue.

And the man was there with a withered hand. And they asked him, Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him? He said to them, Which one of you has a sheep?

[ 1 : 51 ] If it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value is a man than a sheep? So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.

Then he said to the man, Stretch out your hand. And the man stretched it out, and it was restored, healthy like the other. But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him how to destroy him. Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from them. And many followed him, and he healed them all, and ordered them not to make it known.

This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah. Behold my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased.

I will put my spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets.

[ 2 : 59 ] A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory. And in his name, the Gentiles will hope.

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.

And all the people were amazed and said, Can this be the son of David? But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons. 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.

And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself, how then will his kingdom stand? And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out?

[ 4 : 08 ] Therefore they will be your judges. But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. 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. Whoever is not with me is against me. And whoever does not gather with me scatters.

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

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.

Either make the tree good and its fruit bad or make the tree bad and its fruit bad for the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers.

[ 5 : 18 ] How can you speak good when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good.

And the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak.

For by your words you will be justified you will be condemned. Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him saying, Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.

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.

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.

[ 6 : 22 ] 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.

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.

When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person it passes through the waterless places seeking rest but finds none. 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.

Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself and they enter and dwell there and the last estate of that person is worse than the first.

So also will it be with this evil generation. While he was still speaking to the people beholds his mother and brothers stood outside asking to speak to him but he replied to the man who told him who is my mother and who are my brothers and stretching out his hand toward his disciples he said here are my mother and my brothers for whoever does the will of my father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.

[ 8 : 01 ] Amen. May the Lord bless to us his word this morning. I'll do open your Bibles with me if you would at Matthew chapter 12.

It's a rather unnerving thing to realize that Jesus harshest words in the gospels are not spoken to the obvious sinners the sexually immoral the thieves the violent and so on.

Of course he does challenge them also to repent but no Jesus most terrible warnings are spoken to the religious to the orthodox to the very pious to those who spend Sunday mornings in the church pews and indeed to the ministers who speak from those pulpits.

It's a bit of a shock isn't it? But according to the gospels one of the greatest impediments to an encounter with the real and living God into a real experience of the Holy Spirit one of the greatest impediments is respectable organized religion.

Because the truth is that very often these kind of people who love their religion can't cope with the presence of the real Jesus Christ and in fact do everything they can to oppose him.

[ 9 : 45 ] And nor can Jesus remain in the presence of that kind of hostile reaction to him. No, he must remove himself ultimately to the only distance that's justified by that kind of reaction an infinite distance the distance that is between heaven and hell.

Now we saw last time that true rest, that true eternal life are found only in the presence of Jesus. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me and I will give you rest.

So anything that would take us away from the life giving spirit faces us with a real choice. And that choice is one with eternal consequences.

And it's that challenge and it's that choice that we see here in Matthew chapter 12. The choice between lifeless religion and life giving reality of the spirit of God in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

All through the history of Israel all through the Bible God's spirit was confronting his people with his words telling of his promises to them with his works showing his power to them and with his warnings speaking of the real punishment for those who oppose him who reject him.

[ 11 : 10 ] And now in the person of the son of God himself incarnate in that generation God's people Israel are confronted with his spirit in a climactic way in a moment of absolute destiny in a day of decision confronted with Jesus and confronted in him with the unanswerable words and the irrefutable works and therefore the unavoidable warnings of the spirit of God.

But that same confrontation with the presence of God in the person of Jesus Christ that same thing is what will determine the destiny of every generation of every people in need of every single person in this world whether it's now or whenever it is and it will decide it for all eternity no matter

how irreligious or indeed how religious you are no matter how unorthodox or how orthodox you are you cannot have the life of the spirit of God outside of the person of Jesus Christ that's the message here of verses 15 to 21 that lie at the very heart of this chapter have a look you see Matthew is quoting again as he often does from the prophet Isaiah whose message so summed up the great hope of Israel in chapter 11 Jesus pointed John the Baptist to Isaiah promises and he said see all of these things that he promised are being fulfilled now before your very eyes and in quoting from Isaiah 42 as he does here he's saying again all of this is pointing to Jesus verse 18 he is the one in whom God's spirit dwells in its fullness he is the one that John said would baptize you with his spirit would give you life by the Holy Spirit of God himself look look at verse 18 Matthew is saying Jesus is the servant chosen by God beloved of God filled with God's spirit proclaiming his justice verse 19 showing his gentleness bringing his victory and his hope verse 21 to all the gentiles all the nations of the world and yet what this chapter is showing us so clearly is that not just the world but the very professing church itself so often refuses the life giving spirit and would rather take refuge in dead religion that's both dead and deadly and you see the message is clear

Jesus will not force his presence on anyone like that and when he meets that reaction like verse 14 here conspiring against him to destroy him then Jesus verse 15 he will himself depart he will withdraw himself from there he is a gracious and a merciful and a patient savior but there comes a time when he will not cast his pearls any longer before swine and he will withdraw and he will go to those who will welcome his presence and who want to find his healing grace and that's what Matthew emphasizes here as he paraphrases Isaiah's words look at verse 18 and verse 21 Jesus moves on to the Gentiles to the pagan sinners who will in fact hope in Israel's Messiah even if Israel themselves in the main will not and again we see the astonishing mystery of the Israel of Jesus day rejecting their own Messiah and his presence and his message and yet of course you see the truth is so often similar today isn't it met with the challenge of the real Jesus Christ and the real gospel of his apostles the reaction very often of people who profess to belong to the Christian church is just as hostile and therefore just as deadly and dangerous so this chapter is a real challenge for everybody within the professing church of Jesus Christ you might be listening this morning can the professing church cope with the real Jesus and can we who think that we belong squarely within the church of Jesus Christ can we cope with the real implications of his words and his works and indeed his warnings well it's a long chapter here and we can only really skim it but we're going to look at the three sections that surround this central quote from

[16:22] Isaiah and as we do let's attune our ears to hear the challenge of God's spirit to everyone who professes to belong in the professing people of God first of all look at verses 1 to 14 where the Pharisees are faced with the unanswerable words of the spirit of God the spirit's words for man authoritatively explained by Jesus Christ the son here we see very religious people faced with the real implications of God's words in scripture which in fact shattered their illusions of a sort of self contained world of religion a world that has eyes only for the present only for this world only for the things of this world and Jesus shows these people that they have quite literally missed the whole plot of the entire Bible that is in their hands and so they have misunderstood everything with a tragic tragic result because you see when you take the person of

Jesus Christ right out of the very center of the story you turn you turn the wonderful story of God's redemption of man for the life of the world to come you turn it into the grim story of just man's regulation of his fellow man in this present world nothing more than that and so the liberating message and the promise of life by God's grace becomes instead the very opposite it becomes a legalistic message about bondage and about death utterly powerless to help anyone even in this world and that's how Pharisees read the Bible then and indeed still today they read it through religion's spectacles and therefore their only interest was in regulation of life so verse 2 they're incensed you see when the disciples eat a few handfuls of corn on the Sabbath they're reaping they're harvesting that's against the law the instinctive attitude isn't it of the Pharisee to love to regulate it's the person who runs up to you in the shop and shouts at you and says your mask isn't covering your nose and your mouth it's the Pharisee in fact you see the law of God the law of Moses says nothing at all about plucking corn to eat like that while you're out for a walk on the Sabbath that was an addition by their rabbis that was extra red tape to aid proper regulation but it had become just like law set in stone well we're seeing that still today aren't we all sorts of COVID guidance has become for many people set in stone law interestingly very especially

among the church and among Christians isn't that striking spirit of Phariseeism is well alive and kicking today but that's what religion does it puts man and man's wisdom center stage so that you can regulate everything that way so you can make it neat and tidy and safe and managed by man God's law actually becomes domesticated so in fact it's actually just neutralized and you keep out the radical things the unexpected things the untidy things like a God who might surprise you sometimes and when you do that you see you can concentrate much more easily on mastering your performance of religion and we like closed systems like that don't we it's like an exam syllabus in those days when there used to be things like exams you see you can mug up on the syllabus can't you you can mug up on all of it so there's no surprises at all when you come to the exam and people get very very angry don't they if something comes up in the exam that wasn't in the syllabus that's religion you see that's what you're left with when the laws of God when the commands of God are isolated from the real story of what they're all about the story of what God is doing for us not just about what God is telling us to do by way of response and Jesus says to them here in verse 3 no you've got the wrong spectacles on all together so you're reading the Bible all wrong you need to read it with redemption glasses on to see the plot to see what it's all about to see where it's all going and if you do well then you'll see what David himself clearly grasped that God's law is not to bring death but to bring life it's not to hinder the hungry it's to feed them David was God's anointed king and his life was what concerned God not his death and the priests in God's house then knew and understand that they were serving God by serving him with bread even though that bread was strictly speaking only reserved for the priests just as technically the same priests broke the

[ 21 : 53 ] Sabbath themselves every week verse 5 because well they were working in the temple on the Sabbath but they knew that God's laws about the Sabbath and about the temple were about life not about death they were about relationship with God and about God's presence among his people so it would be absurd for the law which commanded a Sabbath and a temple and a priesthood all in order that that God's people could know him and could find life in his presence it would be absurd for that law to be used against the very purpose it existed for but you see that's what religion does when it's corrupted by man it turns the grace of God into the works of man it turns real relationship with God into just rituals and ceremonies of man and that's what the prophets of God constantly warned against look at verse 7 he's quoting

Hosea I desire mercy I desire steadfast love not sacrifice not all your endless religiosity but real relationship a living knowledge of me but you see these Pharisees couldn't see that not then and not today either even in the presence of the Lord of the Sabbath himself verse 8 who created the Sabbath for man and that was redeeming the Sabbath for man from the barrenness of all their legalistic religion but they were blind to the life-giving law of God because they had stripped out the very heart of the Bible which is the presence of the living God and the story of his unfolding plan of salvation to bring his people to himself that's the real message of the whole Old Testament it's a story promising God's transformation of the whole world pointing beyond this broken world to the world that is to come to the kingdom of God to the eternal

Sabbath rest to the weekly Sabbath rest and everything in the temple and all of its imagery pointed forward and promised and prophesied but you see they had confined and constricted all of that to just the concerns of this present world that lost sight completely of where it was all going where it was leading from the very start so they wanted God's law to be tamed to be domesticated to be under their control because that's the way that religion becomes comfortable manageable for human beings that's the great paradox you see it's not just the irreligious pagan who keeps God at a distance the religious Pharisee also equally keeps the real God far away by fostering this illusion of a self-contained world of rules and regulations where we do everything that's in the syllabus so we know that we're never going to be threatened by any great examination that's to come but to do that you see you must keep at a distance any of the really troubling words of the real

God who will convict us and condemn us for our real sin who will speak to us a wickedness that is so terrible there's nothing we can do about it and of a world so fallen that God himself has to totally remake this whole universe and transform it because we are so utterly powerless to help ourselves no matter what our devotion is to all the religion in the world and that's the stark symbolism you see that we see here in verse 10 in the man with the withered hand he's in their synagogue you notice the emphasis there in verse 9 but their precious religion is utterly powerless to help him he's a living symbol of what the withered misery of religion really is without the real power and presence of the

spirit of God and yet here's the really grim truth they're more comfortable living with that deadness with a living reminder of their own deadness than to be faced with the unnerving power of the presence of the spirit of

God and the real Jesus Christ the Pharisees would rather have this man stay as he was and have their self-contained system of religion just remain sacrosanct they would rather have that than for Jesus Christ to shake up their whole world to challenge them with the real implications of his mission and therefore to show them the reality of the heart of their own faith that in fact they had been completely ignored they couldn't care less about this poor man this child of God even though as Jesus says in verse 11 every one of them would very quickly have gone and rescued a sheep of theirs that had fallen down a pit on the Sabbath day so Jesus is challenging so starkly their sanctimonious inhumanity because see when you lose the plot of what the whole Bible is really all about which is the salvation the transformation of this fallen world through the promised Savior through the

[ 27 : 50 ] Son of God and his cross when you leave out God and his eternal kingdom from the center of everything you not only become legalistic about God's law because you forget whose law it actually is but it's that of a good God a holy God a generous and a loving God but you also become utterly inhumane because you forget who the law is for that it's for the good for the blessing for the enrichment of human beings human beings who are made in the image of God who are precious to him who are valued beyond measure that's another paradox you see when you when you make when you make morality and ethics totally man centered instead of God centered far from making making human behavior more humane as the humanists would tell you and want to believe actually it dehumanizes us and far from preserving human worth it diminishes it so sheep become more valuable than human beings made in the image of

God well isn't that what we're seeing more and more in our world today the many animal rights people for whom animal rights trump human rights well verse 12 here is a word for our time is it not how much more valuable is a man than a sheep but of course sheep here also represent wealth and prosperity and well being and just the same when we become man centered and when we become this world centered not God centered not his eternal kingdom centered then again very easily our career our well being our standard of living our prosperity can become far more important to us than say well the life of an unborn baby can be swiftly destroyed so that it doesn't hamper our standard of living or an elderly relative who becomes such a costly burden can be propelled more and more towards the decent path of euthanasia isn't that the thinking increasingly in our world today but don't forget that Jesus is focused here particularly in the synagogue in the gathered church and so we face the challenge don't we could it be that we inside the church care less for the spiritually crippled and the spiritually helpless all around us today than for keeping our experience of church the way we like it giving us what we want in our pleasantly little ordered world of evangelical comfort it's a real challenge to all of us isn't it because the living presence of the real

Jesus will always stir us up he'll always mess up and challenge that kind of this world mentality we're all so prone to sink into that but the real gospel is about a transformation of the world by the breaking in of the kingdom of heaven and that is a kingdom that leaves everyone and everything shaken up and challenged and changed you cannot have comfortable self-contained manageable religion in the presence of the real Jesus Christ and that's why when he confronts people with these unanswerable words of the spirit of God their reaction is very very often so fierce Pharisees went out verse 14 conspired against him how to destroy him the irony and the hypocrisy are breathtaking aren't they they're furious because he heals on the

Sabbath day but they're quite at peace with plotting murder on the Sabbath day but when the real Jesus is proclaimed today we just get the same reaction all too common even in what professes to be his own church look on to verses 22 to 37 because here we see the Pharisees not just confronted with unanswerable words but confronted with the irrefutable works of the spirit of God the spirits work in man authoritatively performed by Jesus Christ the son and these verses are a devastating exposure of the sheer illusion of religion religion that is devoid of the spirit of the living God and so actually is in bondage to evil is in bondage to the devil himself that's Jesus message here it's no wonder the reaction in verse 14 24 is so fierce they called Jesus himself a devil because you see the true message of the gospel about a transformation of the whole universe by the power of God through the cross of Christ is enormously threatening to religious people it exposes our sense that we're doing fine that we don't need to change that there's nothing

wrong with us it tells us that there is a total transformation of life that is needed for all of us whoever we are however pious we think we are but we ourselves are totally unable to make that transformation only a power from totally outside of us can possibly do that and human beings hate that we hate having our impotence our helplessness exposed that's what this pandemic has exposed to us in many ways isn't it that's what explains so much of the response of governments and of scientists because they simply have to believe that they do have the power to control events even things that are plainly uncontrollable like our inevitable mortality like the mutations of microorganisms or indeed the planets in the solar system and the temperature of the planets as though the sun in our solar system were some sort of man-made machine that we could control with a thermostat that's another utter absurdity in the human mind but here man's helplessness man's impotence is exposed starkly by the son of God and again it's a very vivid picture verse 22 the demonized man he's blind he can't even see the truth about himself he's dumb even if he wanted he cannot cry out for help he is utterly powerless utterly impotent and behind all of that says Jesus is bondage to evil is bondage to Satan himself and only

[ 35 : 17 ] Jesus Christ the son of God has power to set him free and to restore him to true human life do you see how offensive this message is because the message of Jesus about the coming kingdom of God that implies also that there is a present kingdom of Satan that is to be overcome and either as verse 30 says here you're in the one kingdom with Jesus and his Holy Spirit or you're in the other with Satan and with his evil spirits and that says Jesus to these people is where you are and only I can rescue you from that house of bondage verse 29 by binding the evil strong man Satan so as to open your eyes to see the truth and open your mouths to confess the truth because no matter who you are or how religious you are without my

Holy Spirit you are as helpless and hopeless as this demonized man you are blind and you are dumb and that is because you are in bondage to Satan himself well how many churchgoers do you know who would appreciate being told that on a Sunday morning well that's what visiting preacher Jesus says that he spoke in that synagogue gathered there the presbytery of Galilee you might call them and that's what Jesus gospel still says to everyone who has not come personally to Jesus Christ to receive the personal transformation that only his Holy Spirit can bring and that can only come to those who submit and bow the knee to Jesus Christ as Lord it is only the living Spirit of God verse 28 you see who can cleanse you of the spiritual blindness of the devil's hold on you and who can reveal to you the kingdom of heaven and only verse 30 do you see only if you come to be with Jesus personally and stop being against

Jesus that that of course means a radically changed life a turning upside down of the religious world that many even very religious people just can't stomach and will not have which is why so often people still respond just like in verse 24 here it's this evangelical gospel of Jesus that's demonic it's a cult it's over the top it's dangerous in fact it's spiritual abuse it's hate speech we need to ban it that's the 21st century translation of verse 24 here the Pharisees can't refute what they've seen they've seen lives utterly transformed by the spirit of God through Jesus they can't deny it so they have to attack the source of his power and that is so often exactly how it is today a teenager will come to

Jesus Christ maybe at a mission or a camp and their life has manifestly changed and their parents can't deny it but they have to try and explain it away to their friends well it's a fad it's an obsession they'll grow out of it we hope they will or maybe more ominously they'll say well it's the terribly bad influence of that Christian organization that kind of organization just shouldn't be allowed in our schools to corrupt our youngsters it's dangerous they should be banned these people are bigots well that's more and more our nation today isn't it where good is branded evil and evil is branded good but Jesus exposes the absurdity of that kind of rationalization verse 26 if he Jesus is evil and demonic well why on earth would he be destroying his own by actually banishing what is evil I read once in the newspaper a report of a mother whose teenage daughter had become a Christian and what she said was it's dangerous fanaticism my daughter stopped getting drunk with her friends and stopped having sex with boys I'm really so worried about her she's become a fanatic well friends is that a devilish transformation does Satan cast out Satan yet you see where the only alternative is to accept the truth about Jesus and to submit to his lordship people are willing to believe any absurdity rather than admit the truth of the evidence and submit to him and the evidence here in Jesus words and in his works is irrefutable the kingdom of

[ 40 : 42 ] God he says verse 28 has come upon you you can see it Jesus isn't just dealing with the consequences of sin he's dealing with victory over what lies behind all sin the power of evil the evil one himself it's a clash of kingdoms and there cannot be any neutrality verse 30 you're either with Jesus or you're with Satan and that's why you see verses 31 and 32 here are so so solemn to be faced with such irrefutable evidence about Jesus and his kingdom it means that to reject Jesus isn't a matter of ignorance it is culpable it's a blasphemy against the Holy Spirit of God himself it is a calculated rejection of his grace and his mercy so freely offered in his gospel it's a spurning of his gracious call to come to me and find rest there are some tender hearted

Christians who worry about a verse like this and who worry could I perhaps blaspheme the Holy Spirit friends the very fact of somebody being worried in that way shows that it's quite impossible that they've done that no Jesus is speaking about a settled refusal of him and of his message he's speaking about an attitude that calls Christ devilish and calls evil good he's speaking about the attitude of heart that is hardened against Christ and his gospel and that is an attitude that's revealed in the fruit of our words and our actions verse 33 if the fruit's good as healing this man undeniably was well the tree that produces it must be good Jesus must be who he shows himself to be the son of God and equally verse 34 their true nature is exposed by their words of hatred and of rejection from their hearts full of evil treasure well much evil has clearly come out that's why Jesus calls them a brood of vipers snakes like the great serpent their true master Satan very solemn isn't it very shocking Jesus words especially when you realize he's speaking to a crowd of ordained ministers and he's saying look at verse 36 and 37 he's saying that the verdict of the great day of judgment of God is being forged now today by your words and your response to the person of Jesus Christ by your words in response to me you'll be justified or condemned because your words of response or rejection of Jesus tell you what is real about whether your heart really belongs to him or whether your heart is blaspheming him as the devil does and so you see in verses 38 to 50 finally the

Pharisees are faced with the unavoidable warning of the spirit of God the Holy Spirit's warning to human beings authoritatively declared by Jesus Christ the son Jesus final assault on these people who are so taken up with their religious way of life it's a direct assault on their self assurance religion exposes sheer pride self righteousness in them religion you see can be so brazen can be so resistant to the command of God to be humble to submit to him for the transformation that can only really come from his Holy Spirit and religion clings to the belief that we don't really need to change that we can tame God that we can make God fit in with our lives that's such a common attitude still today we can't have a God who will say that this thing that I want to have in my life is wrong no we must reinterpret the

Bible to agree with me about marriage about sex about whatever it might be that we want it to say that's the spirit isn't it of verse 38 here the scribe so you give us a sign you accommodate yourself to our demands and then perhaps we'll give you a hearing Jesus but Jesus just calls that for what it is it's not a helpful dialogue no verse 39 it's evidence of evil hearts it's evidence of apostasy of spiritual adultery no sign for this evil and adulterous generation except a really scandalous sign his resurrection after they have killed him and put him to death it'll be the same sign in a way that the pagan city of Nineveh that wicked place had from Jonah verse 40 the messenger of God the prophet of God remember he was as good as dead for three days in the fish's belly but God brought him up out of that watery grave and sent him to preach to that city about the coming judgment of God commanding them to repent or to perish and pagan Nineveh

[ 46 : 34 ] Gentile Nineveh did repent verse 41 just as the pagan queen did bow to the wisdom of God's anointed king Solomon verse 42 in her day and here is something far greater than Jonah or Solomon the son of God himself bringing the unavoidable warning of God's Holy Spirit God himself on this earth proclaiming words of judgment but preaching the only way of salvation and yet this generation most privileged in the history of the earth is refusing him persistently and perversely and so time is running out God's kingdom has been sweeping in since John the Baptist began his ministry but a choice has to be made repent or perish and be condemned you can't maintain neutrality says Jesus whoever is not with me is against me and it's the reality of these two utterly opposite responses that you see laid out in these last two paragraphs unless Jesus possesses our life fully unless we respond to him with a total surrender so that he fills the void left by everything else in our previous existence unless that is true then we are just engaged in a dangerous pretense that will have disastrous consequences that's the message isn't it of verses 43 to 45 he's saying

don't trifle with the call of Jesus and his kingdom don't just play with it for a little time don't just make it as though Jesus is cleaning up your life a little bit but that you're not truly becoming the permanent dwelling place of his Holy Spirit so that he does occupy every every part of your life as your Lord and your Master it can be nothing more terrible according to the New Testament than to have tasted the goodness of the word of God the powers of the age to come as Hebrews chapter 6 puts it and yet to have fallen away to have held the Son of God in contempt no says Jesus here in verse 45 the last state of that person will be far worse than the first sevenfold he says will be the darkness of that terrible satanic bondage friends that may be a word to somebody who's listening this morning don't fail to heed Jesus' warning don't be the person described in these verses failing to take Jesus' call as one with absolute all-consuming seriousness no rather see what verses 46 to 50 show us as the only way to respond truly to him be the one that he calls in verse 49 they're a true disciple part of his true family a brother a sister mother of Jesus Christ who are they?

well notice they are not those who can claim kinship through any natural association even a lifelong association with him no rather look at verse 50 they are those who actually submit to his lordship who do the will of my father in heaven as Jesus Christ has revealed it uniquely and forever these are the ones and the only ones he makes clear that he wants to be with these are the only ones that he can be present with remember what Jesus said back in Matthew chapter 7 many will say on that day Lord Lord oh yes we're Christians Jesus says no I never knew you depart from me you workers of lawlessness we began you see with this question can the professing church stand the presence of the real Jesus Christ but perhaps we need to end with turning the question the other way can the real Jesus Christ stand the presence of those in his professing church a real challenge a real challenge to all of us in every church because you can be as orthodox you can be as bible quoting as you like but either we truly are bound to the person of Jesus as he truly is and filled with his spirit of true holiness which manifests in a real love for his presence and for his words and for his ways and a real love for his people his family our family either that really is true or what this chapter tells us so clearly is that he will not be able to stand being anywhere near us and like verse 15 he will withdraw himself and go to others he has ears to hear let him hear what the spirit says to the churches let's pray do not grieve the holy spirit of God by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption

Lord forgive us we pray for we do often seek to silence the words of your spirit to us we do try to tame you to protect ourselves from your challenge from your call and our lives forgive us and may the light of your truth pierce the darkest corners of our hearts and cleanse us afresh and bend the knees of our heart to your lordship so that we may indeed be those who do the will of our father in heaven now every day all the days of our lives hear us lord and help us for we ask it in Jesus name amen