

He is Here

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[0 : 0 0] Now, we're continuing our study of Matthew 11 and 12 under the title of The Kingdom Advancing, and we come to the second last one, Matthew chapter 12, and we're on page 817.

We're reading Matthew chapter 12, verses 15 to 37. Matthew chapter 12, verse 15.

Jesus aware of this, the this referred to here is the fact in the previous verse, verse 14, the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him.

That's the this here. Jesus aware of this withdrew from there, and many followed him, and he healed them all and ordered them not to make him known.

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

[1 : 0 3] 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.

A bruised reed he will not break, a smoldering wick he will not quench, till 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 Jesus, 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, he said, is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons. Knowing these thoughts, he said to them, every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself can stand.

And if Satan casts out Satan, he is a vider against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? If I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out?

[2 : 1 5] 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 among you.

Or can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And 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 who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven. 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 good, or the tree bad and its fruit bad. For the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers, How can you speak good when you are evil?

[3 : 2 5] 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, and by your words you will be condemned.

Amen. This is the word of the Lord, and may he bless it to our hearts. Let's pray. God our Father, we listen to these words, and we recognize their power and their challenge.

We recognize that these are not simply the words of humans, not simply ancient words, but words of the living God, spoken to us here and now, and spoken to us so that we may hear, and that we may live.

And help us in these moments, as we have drawn aside from our normal activities, to listen to your voice. Help us to hear that voice, and help us to go back to our normal activities, changed and transformed, because we have heard your word by your spirit.

[4 : 40] We ask this in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. There was once a caliph of Egypt who ordered the burning of the great library at Alexandria.

That's the Alexandria in Egypt, of course, not the one up the road. And the reason he gave for this act of vandalism was that the books in it either contained what was already in the Koran, in which case they were unnecessary, or they contradicted the Koran, in which case they were blasphemous.

Now, that attitude in a milder form I often find when people are talking about the Bible. Many people imagine that everything we need is in the New Testament, and therefore the Old Testament can safely be ignored.

Now, in a passage like this, this is Matthew refers so extensively to the Old Testament, not just quoting it, but referring to its background, that we realize that Jesus is saying, you won't understand me unless you see me through the eyes of the Old Testament prophets and other writers.

That's something we need to keep in mind. Who is Jesus? Well, Jesus is saying, if you want to understand me, read the Bible. And when Jesus says, read the Bible, he is, of course, meaning the Old Testament.

[6 : 07] On the Emmaus Road, Jesus didn't say to the two disciples, you don't need the Bible now, you've got me. What he did see was, or we don't know the actual words, beginning in Moses and all the prophets, he showed to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

So he's saying, it's not a case of the Bible or me, it's a case of the Bible which points to me, which shows who I am. Now, you'll notice this begins with him withdrawing from there.

And Jesus often withdrew when the opposition became intense and encouraged his disciples to withdraw with him. There's nothing in the Bible that advocates a workaholic Christianity.

The Bible tells us that we need to rest, that we need to refresh ourselves, that we need to withdraw from the busyness. And this is what happens here.

But the trouble was, in Jesus' case, many followed him and he healed them all. His ministry continues, verse 16, you ordered them not to make him known.

[7 : 22] That's very odd, isn't it? Because at the end of the gospel, he's going to say, go and make disciples of all nations, telling them about the things that I've done and bringing them to faith.

So why does he say here, he ordered them not to make him known? It's because his ministry reached the stage where he didn't want people to believe in him simply because of the mighty works that were being done.

He wanted a genuine faith, a faith that was based on who he was, what he was yet to do, not just simply on sensationalism. So the point of this section here is it's telling us very clearly now who Jesus is in terms, as I say, particularly of Old Testament pictures.

So first of all, he is God's servant. Hence the quote from Isaiah. The quote from Isaiah here in verses 18 to 21, Isaiah 42, one of the servant passages in these chapters in Isaiah.

Isaiah. And there's a further contrast here between the gentleness of the Lord, genuine servant, and the harshness and violent opposition he's facing.

[8 : 40] He does heal, but the emphasis here is not so much on the healing, but on the healer, who he is. Behold, I will put my spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles.

Now, back in the earlier chapters, Matthew has shown us the spirit descending from heaven and resting on Jesus as God himself speaks from heaven and says who he is.

This is anticipating the passage later on about blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. And the emphasis here is on the nations. He will proclaim justice to the Gentiles, to the nations, and on justice, the character of God for the good of the nations and also calling them to account.

Justice is at the very heart of God's purposes for the nations. After all, we live in a world where justice is often flouted and where almost every day there are further incidents of terrorism and violence and so on.

This servant is going to establish justice. And there's a lack of brashness about him. He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets.

[9 : 56] A bruise reed, he will not break. Now, obviously, it doesn't mean he's not going to speak. It doesn't even mean he's not going to speak in the streets. What it means, he's not going to make a song and dance.

He's not going to be vulgar like some modern politicians. I'm not going to mention any names, but I'm sure you can think of examples.

He is going to be gentle to the weak and to the hurting. Bruise reed in the smoldering wick. And a broken rod lying on the ground.

A flame that's almost gone out. He is not going to crush them. But he is going to confront evil. And, of course, the only way to bring justice to the hurting, to the vulnerable, is to confront evil.

And notice, in his name, the Gentiles will hope he's going to bring justice to victory. In other words, his mission is going to succeed. Now, of course, in his earthly life, there was success.

[11 : 08] And there was lack of success. People did not all believe. Just as today, there are people who believe and people who don't believe.

There are times of growth and development, times of, which are not that case. Those of you who have lived any length of time in the Christian world will know that. Not just from history, but from our own day.

And we need to have this. That's why he says, in his name, the Gentiles will hope. You may not see it now. You may not see it in your lifetime, but it will come.

He is God's servant. Matthew gradually filling in the picture of who Jesus is. Secondly, he is the son of David. Verse 23.

People said, can this be the son of David? Again, typically of Matthew, there's an instant of healing, very briefly. Blind and a mute.

[12 : 07] Demon oppressed, blind and mute. That's what the devil does. He makes people blind and he makes people deaf and dumb. That is the mark of the devil. When Jesus comes, he opens eyes, he opens ears, and he causes people to speak.

The devil, on the other hand, does none of these things. He causes death. He causes deafness. He causes blindness. And he causes death. That's the difference there.

So you see, Matthew is telling us just to draw attention to who Jesus is. Interesting, you can compare Matthew and Mark. Matthew is considerably longer than Mark. But Matthew is considerably longer not because he tells us more detail of the stories of Jesus.

He actually tells us less. The stories of Mark tend to be much longer. But because of his teaching, Matthew's gospel is built around these blocks of teaching.

So this is a literal incident. But it reveals truth. He literally, in this case, the man is literally blind and now he sees, he is, he's mute, and now he's able to speak.

[13 : 20] As I say, the devil makes people both blind and speechless. When the devil touches people's tongues, he either makes us dumb or he makes us talk nonsense. I mean, that is the characteristic of the devil.

And this would be the son of David, is he? Now, the son of David was, had been promised all through the Old Testament.

And this is slightly different from the servant. There's all these pictures together. We need all of them together to build up our picture of Christ. David, the great king. The end of David's life, David summed up what the rule of the just king would be like.

He says, when someone rules over people justly, it's like the sunshine in the morning, like the bright sun in the morning, and it's like the rain on the parched desert.

In other words, it is life-giving. That's what will happen when the son of David comes, the true king. Now, you have to remember in the Old Testament, these kings, David, Solomon, other good kings like Hezekiah and Josiah, they weren't the one who is to come, but they were genuine pictures.

[14 : 35] Read the story of Solomon's early days, how the kingdom prospered, how people lived in peace and security. And there is a picture of the kingdom that is to come.

The problem is they hadn't yet linked the Messiah, the son of David, and the suffering servant. And that is the problem even the disciples had.

They loved those prophecies, of course, of the son of David. They loved these prophecies of the Messiah, the king who would reign over the whole world. There's also these prophecies of the suffering servant.

And of course, Isaiah goes on in chapter 52 and 53 particularly to talk of the suffering of the servant. The rabbis, their teachers, would tend to apply that passage to Israel itself.

Israel, the servant of God who had suffered badly in exile and so on. There is, of course, truth in that. That's not, but it's not the whole truth because Israel suffered, but Israel's sufferings did not redeem Israel.

[15 : 41] Israel's sufferings did not rescue Israel. Needed someone else. Someone who himself came from Israel. Someone who was the true son of David. But the third part, the longest part, is he is the one who is filled with the Spirit.

This is 24. When the Pharisees heard it, they didn't deny that Jesus had power. What they did deny was the origin of that power.

He is only by Beelzebul, or Beelzebub, the lord of the flies, the dung god, the Canaanite god, whom Elijah attacked so strongly in the books of Kings.

Some of you will have read the novel, *The Lord of the Flies*, by William Golding, where a group of public schoolboys are marooned on an island, and they turn into desperate little savages.

And there's a good deal of talk about the beast as a pig's head on the stake in a glade on the forest on the island. And the evil becomes to be identified with it.

[16 : 52] One of the characters said, no, it's not. It's us. We are the problem. The evil's in us. But Beelzebub was a common name for the devil, another name for Satan himself, the clash of the kingdoms.

Now, Jesus, and Jesus, of course, first of all, shows how stupid this is. Every kingdom, verse 25, divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand.

How can I be casting out demons if I'm in league with the prince of demons? That's the point he's making. And he is basically saying that how is it then, by whom do your sons cast them out?

After all, they had read in the prophets, they had read in the prophets of the stories, for example, of Elijah and Elisha who had confronted these evil gods and in the power of God defeated them.

So, he says, look, if the, verse 28, if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come among you.

[18 : 11] And this is about, this is the passage now, about blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Now, it's both a rebuke to the Pharisees and a warning to the crowds not to be like them.

Now, what is this sin of speaking against the Spirit? Sometimes, this is called the unforgivable sin. One thing I would want to say is if you are worried that you have committed this sin, then be assured you certainly have not.

Because one of the main marks of this sin is that you do not think it is a sin at all. It is the point. The point is, it's not, it's not that God won't forgive, it's that we don't want to be forgiven.

That is the problem about this. You see, and it doesn't mean that the Son of Man is less important than the Spirit. Jesus isn't saying, well, it's the end you like about me, provided you don't say it about the Holy Spirit.

It's about the nature of Jesus' ministry then and now. The Spirit's task is to draw attention to Christ. The Spirit's task is, John says this, Jesus says this in John 15 and 16, the Spirit, he will not speak of himself, he will speak of me.

[19 : 37] And what Jesus is saying is if you fail to recognize that the Spirit of God is speaking through me, if you fail to deny that the work of God is being done through me, deliberately, persistently, then you cannot be forgiven because you do not believe that you need to be forgiven.

Somebody once said to John Wesley, Wesley, I never forgive. And Wesley replied, well, I hope you never sin. It's like the, it's like in the Lord's prayer, forgive us as we forgive others.

Now, that doesn't mean God is saying if you don't forgive others, I'm jolly well not going to forgive you. It's rather petty sounding, isn't it? What it's saying is if we don't forgive others, we'll gradually become shriveled and vindictive inside and unable to accept forgiveness.

Forgiveness. And when the Spirit of God is working, then Jesus is saying that you must, if you speak against that, you'll not, I in this age are in the age to come.

Why can't we be forgiven in the age to come? Because the age to come will be the age of the fullness of the Spirit. We don't accept grace now. How can we accept grace then? That's the point that's being made.

[21 : 06] And I think that's the point of verses 33 to 37 which don't seem to fit very closely. I think they do. Jesus is saying what we are is revealed not just by what we do but by what we say.

Now, you know, look how I phrase actions speak louder than words and that ridiculous childhood playground rhyme sticks and stones and break your bones so words can never hurt you.

That's nonsense. Words can and do hurt deeply. I'm sure everyone here can remember unkind, thoughtless, cruel words which sometimes years later still sting and still hurt because our words reveal what's in our hearts.

Now, I know there's a kind of speech of course which literally tries to conceal. That's not what Jesus is talking about here. Jesus is saying inevitably what we are and what we think about will surface in our conversation.

You know this, don't you? I mean, every time we have conversations what we really want to talk about emerges, doesn't it? You know the definition of a bore, don't you?

[22 : 26] Someone who talks about themselves when you want to talk about yourself. And that's what Jesus is speaking about. Our true thoughts and attitudes coming out in what we say. Your words will be every careless word they speak. Now, once again, that's not to make us worried and make us neurotic.

What Jesus is saying is even what we say off the record. In fact, possibly, especially what we say off the record reveals what we are like and what we are.

What we say matters and what we say matters not just for this world but for the world to come. So, you see, these incidents hang together.

Jesus is here. Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus is the Son of David. Jesus is the servant. Jesus is the one filled with the spirit and the matter of the tree here is so common.

[23 : 31] A good tree and a bad tree and here it's particularly applied to what is said. And shortly after this, we won't get to it, but in chapter 13, he's going on to use parables which both conceal and reveal and therefore find out how serious his claims are.

So, Jesus, the Son of Man, comes to us as he came to that generation. He calls us to live for him, to speak for him, and to believe in him.

Amen. Let's pray. Lord God, we realize that often our words are thoughtless, often our words are cruel, often our words are foolish.

We pray that you will help us to guard our tongue, help us to guard our heart, and help us, as the days pass, to grow more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ, who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[24 : 48] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.