
LIFE BIBLE STUDY

SESSION OBJECTIVE: MATTHEW 12:9-50

To understand how Jesus fulfills the prophets, and what the unforgivable sin is.

Saturday! Saturday! Saturday!

There were not many more exciting things as a kid than waking up on Saturday morning. I didn't become a big fan of school until much later in my life, and so the sweet freedom of the weekend was something I looked forward to constantly. I enjoyed Saturday morning cartoons. I grew up on a street with other kids my age in a



time when playing outside all day with little to no supervision was an afterthought (although still, probably not very smart). Whether riding our bikes, rollerblading, or playing sports, we used the whole day to exert all of that stored up energy from a week of sitting in a classroom. Now, as an adult and father, I look forward to Saturdays as much if not more. Our Saturdays are our, “family days,” and we spend time together doing all kinds of activities together. Saturdays bring freedom to do restorative activities.

In Jesus' day, Saturdays were anything but representative of freedom. In last week's session, we saw Jesus declare that He is, “Lord of the Sabbath” (Matt. 12:8), and in our passage today, we see Him healing a man on

the Sabbath in the synagogue. Prior to the healing, the Pharisees seize the opportunity to try and back Jesus into a corner. “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath,” one man asks (Matt. 12:10). Jesus responds with a short parable of sorts, and then proclaims, “It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath” (Matt. 12:12). It seems Saturdays were more complicated during this time than they are today.

“And they questioned Jesus, asking, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” — so that they might accuse Him.”
(Matt. 11:20)

An Incomplete Isaiah

Aware of the plans of the Pharisees to destroy Jesus, he departed from where he was and went to an undisclosed place and many followed Him. While He was there He healed several individuals and Matthew tells us that this all happened to fulfill what the prophet Isaiah had spoken in Isaiah 42:1-4, but there is a notable part of the text missing.

MATTHEW'S QUOTE OF ISAIAH (MATTHEW 12:18-21)

“Behold, My servant whom I have chosen, My beloved in whom My soul is well-pleased; I will put My Spirit upon Him, and He shall proclaim justice to the Gentiles. He will not quarrel, nor cry out; nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets. A battered reed He will not break off, and a smoldering wick He will not put out, Until He leads justice to victory. And in His Name the Gentiles will hope.”

THE ORIGINAL ISAIAH TEXT (ISAIAH 42:1-4)

“Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry out or raise His voice, nor make His voice heard in the street. A bruised reed He will not break and a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish; *He will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not be disheartened or crushed,* Until He has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands will wait expectantly for His law.”

Examining the texts, it's clear that there are some differences. For one, Matthew is almost no doubt quoting the LXX version of Isaiah, not the Masoretic Text. The emphasis on “Gentiles” rather than the generic, “nations,” is not a change in the original meaning, for “nations,” simply meant any non-Jewish grouping of people, i.e. “Gentiles.” More notable than that, however, is that clearly Isaiah 42:3b-4a is omitted by Matthew. The reasoning here is that Jesus *is* crushed, and by choice, and that justice is not fully brought forth until His second coming (Is. 53:10; Jn. 10:17-18; Rev. 19:11).

Two Very Different Titles

Next Jesus casts out another demon. This is the second time that we have seen demon possession correspond to either muteness or blindness (the other being in Matthew 9:32), and in both instances Jesus heals them fully and their sight and hearing returns. This is not, however, issuing a universal cause for such ailments. In John 9, Jesus heals another blind man who was blind from birth, and was not possessed by a demon. Remember, the Gospel According to Matthew is a narrative that describes events that happened. While we can and should extract truths and applications for our lives, these narratives are not meant to be read like one of Paul's Epistles. Knowing the literary genre of a text is critical to understanding how to interpret it.

There is another similarity between these two exorcisms. In both instances the crowds see the exorcism take place and are amazed, but the Pharisees accuse Jesus of operating by the power of demons or even Satan himself. The name, “Beelzebul” is the name of a Philistine deity referenced in a story about King Ahazia in 2 Kings 1:2 (written, “Baal-zebub”). The name’s root is the word, “Baal,” hence the pagan and demonic connotation. It means the, “lord of the flies.” This is essentially a charge against Jesus of witchcraft.

On the other hand, the crowds in Matthew 12 ascribe to Him one of the two big titles first seen in the very first verse of Matthew’s Gospel. If you remember all the way back to Session 1, Jesus is called, “The Son of David, the Son of Abraham.” These two titles have deep significance, and here in this passage, “the Son of David,” is used. Jesus, as the, “Son of David,” is being described as the Davidic Messiah King who will sit on the throne of David and rule over Judah forever (2 Sam. 7:8-17). This exorcism gets people’s attention again in a big way.

The Unforgivable Sin

Perhaps one of the scariest (and misunderstood) verses in the New Testament occurs in this chapter of Matthew’s Gospel. Jesus unveils the terrifying reality that there is a type of sin that cannot be forgiven. What does Jesus mean by this? To understand this, one must take into account the immediate context. Jesus has just performed an exorcism, and the response of the Pharisees to this tremendous miracle was to accuse Jesus of witchcraft. Herein lies the foundation upon which Jesus makes this statement. It’s one thing to call into question and even blaspheme Jesus’ sayings or teachings, but to call a clear work of the Spirit of God demonic is to overstep a boundary.

The question is, did Jesus mean merely, “a word spoken against the Spirit,” or did He mean the attitude of the heart of the speaker. There is an Old Testament understanding that the Jews would have likely had. In Numbers 15:30-31, the idea of blaspheming the Lord is directly connected to anyone who acts in a defiant manner. Someone who willfully rejects God and His commandments is seen as, “blaspheming the LORD.” This is precisely what the Pharisees are doing on an even greater scale. To witness God’s undeniable power working through Jesus and not only deny its credibility but ascribe evil to it is to defiantly reject the Spirit in such a way that repentance is off the table. It’s not that this sin is unforgivable by God, but rather that the person places themselves in such a hardened place that they never desire to repent. In an unrepentant and willfully rebellious state, God cannot and will not forgive. The way you can think about this is if you are concerned or worried that you may have uttered some phrase that is blasphemous and want to be repentant of it, you probably don’t have anything to worry about. It’s those who not only practice rebellion but, “give hearty approval to those who practice them” (Rom. 1:32).

Jonah Typology

If you recall in Session 2, we discussed Matthew’s usage of something called Typology. Here in verses 38 through 42, we see it employed again. Jesus is the greater Jonah. The three rules are met in this passage. The rule of definition is in play, as Jesus is the one making the connection. The rule of correspondence is in play, as Jesus and Jonah have some strong similarities (e.g. 3 days and 3 nights in the belly of the fish/earth). The rule of escalation is in play as well, as Jesus literally died whereas Jonah was preserved in the belly of the fish. This makes the Jonah story much more interesting, because though it was about a man named Jonah and his rebellion against God’s will for his life, there was a deeper story that God was weaving through his life that would ultimately connect with the Messiah.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Matthew 12:9-14. What is the central problem that the Pharisees have with Jesus in this passage? How does the context in the passage before this set the stage?
2. Read Matthew 12:15-21. Now, read Isaiah 42:1-4. What is the significance of the verses left out in the quotation from Isaiah 42?

Day Two

1. Read Matthew 12:22-30. What causes the contention with the Pharisees in this passage? What does Jesus say in response? Who is Beelzebul?
2. Read Matthew 12:31-32. What are the two types of sins and blasphemies Jesus mentions here? Who is the Son of Man, and what is the significance of this title (Hint: Read Daniel 7:13-14)?

Day Three

1. Read Matthew 12:33-37. How important are our words? What does Jesus say will happen at the judgment regarding your words?
2. Read Matthew 12:38-42. Write down the ways Jonah and Jesus correspond to one another. How is Jesus the *greater* Jonah? What does it mean that the Ninevites will condemn Jesus' generation?

Day Four

1. Read Matthew 12:43-45. In your own words, summarize this passage. What's the big idea?
2. Read Matthew 12:46-50. What does Jesus say regarding the priority of family? What truly defines family?

Week 16 Discussion: Is Repentance Possible?

Jesus definitely gets our attention when He talks about an, "unforgivable sin." The thrust of His statement, however, is regarding the position of the heart in defiant, willful rebellion that keeps it from being able to repent. This is highly problematic, because repentance is a cornerstone act to the follower of Christ. Discuss with your group the benefits and challenges of repentance.

1. Icebreaker: What was the most difficult thing to repent of? What was the easiest thing to repent of?
2. Have you ever been convicted about a sin, and troubled deeply by it, but struggled to actually repent of it? Why do you think it was such a struggle?
3. What is repentance? What do it mean to repent? Use Scripture if possible.
4. Is repentance a one-time act or an every day act? Why? Use Scripture if possible.
5. What led you to repentance and faith in Christ? Share a little bit of your story and what changed in your heart to lead you humble yourself before God.

Takeaways:

1. Jesus fulfills many of the prophets through His Messianic ministry.
2. The unforgivable sin is not so much an utterance, but a defiant and rebellious position of the heart.

PRAYER REQUESTS: