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Location: First Baptist Church Tallassee

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Summary

This lesson examines the controversies Jesus faced in Matthew chapter 12, presenting them as lessons for modern Christians. It highlights three key conflicts: the Sabbath (holiness), the Spirit (the heart), and the Signs (Jesus's identity). The speaker explains how Jesus confronted the Pharisees' rigid legalism regarding Sabbath actions and the source of His power to heal and cast out demons. The teaching covers Jesus's warning about the unpardonable sin (blasphemy against the Holy Spirit), the way words reveal the heart's condition, and the sign of Jonah as a prophecy of His resurrection. The conclusion emphasizes that spiritual relationships outweigh earthly ones and that genuine faith is evidenced by action.

Knowledge Points

1. Controversies in Jesus's Ministry

- **The Rejection of Jesus by Jewish Leaders**
 - Jesus offered Himself and His kingdom of peace to the Jews, but the religious leadership rejected both.
 - They refused to accept His miracles as proof of His deity, attributing them to Satan (Beelzebub) instead.
 - This rejection echoes John 1:11: "He came to his own, and his own people did not accept him."
- **Three Main Controversies in Matthew 12**
 - The lesson centers on three controversies:
 - The Sabbath, concerning holiness.
 - The Spirit, concerning the heart.
 - The Signs (miracles), concerning Jesus's identity.

2. The Sabbath Controversy (Holiness)

- **The Incident in the Grain Field**
 - In Matthew 12:1, Jesus and His disciples walked through grain fields on the Sabbath, picking and eating heads of grain because they were hungry.
 - The Pharisees claimed this was unlawful on the Sabbath.
 - Yet Deuteronomy 23 permitted eating from a farmer's field for a personal meal; only harvesting for profit was forbidden. The Pharisees' charge lacked legal basis.
- **Jesus's Scriptural Defense**
 - Jesus cited two scriptural examples:

- King David and his companions ate consecrated bread reserved for priests when they were hungry.
 - Priests “profane” the Sabbath through temple duties and are innocent.
 - Jesus declared, “something greater than the temple is here,” identifying Himself as God, superior to the temple.
- **The Intent of the Law**
 - Jesus rebuked the leaders for prioritizing their interpretations over the law’s intent.
 - He quoted Hosea 6:6: “I desire compassion rather than sacrifice,” showing God values sincere, compassionate hearts over outward rituals.
 - He condemned the Pharisees for elevating tradition above God’s law (cf. Mark 7).
- **Healing on the Sabbath**
 - In the synagogue, a man with a withered hand was present.
 - The Pharisees asked if healing on the Sabbath was lawful, seeking grounds to accuse Him.
 - Acts of mercy and healing were traditionally permitted on the Sabbath, but the Pharisees twisted the law to portray them as illegal.
 - Jesus asked who would not rescue a sheep that fell into a pit on the Sabbath, arguing that a person is far more valuable, making it lawful to do good on the Sabbath.
 - Before they could reply, Jesus healed the man’s hand. The Pharisees were enraged and plotted to destroy Him.
- **Jesus’s Withdrawal and Continued Healing**
 - Aware of their plot, Jesus withdrew. Large crowds followed, and “He healed them all.”
 - He warned them not to publicize Him—not to hide, but because He did not need promotion; He wanted the focus on God rather than miracles.
 - This fulfilled Isaiah 42, presenting the Messiah as a meek, lowly servant who brings justice and offers hope to the Gentiles.

3. The Spirit Controversy (The Heart)

- **Casting Out Demons**
 - Jesus healed a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute. The crowds wondered if He was the “son of David” (the Messiah).
 - The Pharisees claimed He cast out demons by Beelzebub, the ruler of demons.
 - Beelzebub (a name for Satan from a Philistine deity) means “Lord of the Flies,” associated with death, corruption, and evil. It is suggested the Pharisees may have brought the man as a trap.
- **Jesus’s Rebuttal**
 - Knowing their thoughts, Jesus dismantled their logic:
 - “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste.” Satan would not cast out his own demons; that would weaken his kingdom.
 - He asked about their own “sons” (Jewish exorcists) who claimed to cast out demons by God’s power. If they accepted that, why not believe He did it by the Spirit of God?

- He likened Satan to a strong man whose house cannot be plundered unless he is first bound.
 - Jesus declared neutrality impossible: “The one who is not with me is against me,” warning that time was running out to accept the kingdom.
- **The Unpardonable Sin**
 - Jesus said every sin and blasphemy can be forgiven, but “blasphemy against the Holy Spirit shall not be forgiven.”
 - This unpardonable sin is refusing the Spirit’s offer of salvation; the Spirit is the agent of salvation, and rejecting Him cannot be forgiven.
 - Denying Jesus as the Son of Man could be forgiven, but attributing the Spirit’s work to the devil was blasphemy against the Spirit.
 - Forgiveness remained possible through genuine repentance, yet the Pharisees showed no desire to repent.
- **Words Reveal the Heart**
 - Using the tree-and-fruit analogy, Jesus taught that words reveal the heart’s contents.
 - He called the Pharisees “offspring of vipers,” linking them to the serpent in Eden, exposing hearts filled with evil, doubt, and rebellion.
 - He warned that people will answer for every careless word on Judgment Day; words can justify or condemn. Christians should be careful with speech.

4. The Signs Controversy (Jesus Himself)

- **The Sign of Jonah**
 - The scribes and Pharisees demanded another sign. Jesus called them an “evil and adulterous generation” and refused any new sign except “the sign of Jonah.”
 - As Jonah was in the sea creature’s belly three days and three nights, the Son of Man would be in the earth’s heart for the same duration.
 - This foretold His resurrection—the greatest sign in history.
- **Clarifying “Three Days and Three Nights”**
 - Jews counted any part of a day as a full day; their day began at sundown.
 - Day 1: Friday, from crucifixion until sundown.
 - Day 2: Saturday, from Friday sundown to Saturday sundown.
 - Day 3: Sunday, from Saturday sundown to the Sunday morning resurrection.
 - Better phrasing: “three days and the nights associated with them.”
- **Judgment Using Old Testament Examples**
 - Jesus said repentant figures from the Old Testament would condemn His generation at judgment:
 - The men of Nineveh, a wicked people, repented at Jonah’s brief eight-word sermon—corroborated by secular history.
 - The Queen of Sheba traveled from “the ends of the earth” to hear Solomon’s wisdom, though Solomon was merely human.
 - Jesus declared, “something greater than Jonah is here” and “something greater than Solomon is here,” yet the leaders refused to believe.
- **The Parable of the Unclean Spirit**

- Jesus told of an unclean spirit leaving a person, finding no rest, then returning to its “house” (the person), now “unoccupied, swept, and put in order.” It brings seven more wicked spirits, making the final state worse.
- Dr. Harry Ironside’s view: the man represents Israel; the demon, idolatry. After the Babylonian exile, Israel abandoned idolatry but never fully embraced God.
- The empty house symbolizes hearts that, having rejected the Messiah, will one day be indwelt by a worse demon—pointing to the Antichrist and “the time of Jacob’s trouble.”

5. The Nature of True Family

- **Spiritual vs. Earthly Relationships**
 - While Jesus spoke, His mother and brothers sought Him.
 - He asked, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” then pointed to His disciples: “Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”
 - Spiritual relationships surpass earthly ones.
- **Salvation for All**
 - Jesus’s family (except possibly Mary at that time) did not believe in Him until after the resurrection (Acts 1:14).
 - They needed salvation through faith like everyone else.
 - “Doing the will” of the Father is not salvation by works; works are evidence of salvation. People serve God because of what He has done for them.

Next Steps

- Reflect on the warning that every careless word will be judged; practice mindful, edifying speech daily.
- Consider the unpardonable sin and the necessity of an open, responsive heart to the Holy Spirit’s call to salvation.
- Review the handout on controversies; identify personal areas of legalism or misunderstanding, and pray for guidance and strength to stand firm in difficult times.

Assignments

- Review the handout sheet on controversies and how to stand firm; pray for guidance in difficult times.
- Reflect on the warning that every careless word will be judged; be mindful of your speech.
- Consider the concept of the unpardonable sin and the importance of having an open heart to the Holy Spirit.