

Rev. Dustin Daniels | River Bible Church
Matthew 12:43-45 | Why Jesus Hates Religion
Sunday February 11, 2024

WELCOME:

- Please turn your Bibles to Matthew 12.
- Bibles in the back—our gift to you.
- Notes in the foyer—take home with you.

REVIEW:

Last Sunday I mentioned how Matthew 12 is a challenging chapter to study.

It's tough because Matthew reveals the interior motives that we all share.

So Matt uses the motives of religious people as 'exhibit A.' Together attention.

It seems that every time Jesus runs into the Scribes and Pharisees, there is a fight.

We've learned through both words and actions how the Scribes and Pharisees don't love God—they love their religion.

Loving God and loving religion are two very different types of love.

Loving God is to love the person of Jesus Christ.

Loving religion is to love a system of rules based on opinion and morality.

+ **Religion**—Self-defined (corporate) morality. Living by our own rules and standards. *→ cults / denominations*
opinions about God.

Today, people say, "Live your own truth/Do your own thing/You do You."

Meaning, you do what you think is right, and I'll do what I think/feel or believe is right.

The biggest problem with man-made religion is that its foundation is found within our opinion of morality is or isn't.

Religion says—*If I can just tweak my behavior and become a better person, then God will love me.*

God is not primarily interested in your behavior.

He's primarily interested in your heart.

Time and time again, Jesus tells us to deal with the state of our sinful hearts.

Once again, we have much to learn about what not to do from the Scribes and Pharisees.

From the outside, these men looked very pious, religious, and moral.

But on the inside, they were dead men walking.

Later in Matt's Gospel, Jesus calls these men "whitewashed tombs." (Matt 22:37)

Jesus came to save us from ourselves by offering a personal saving relationship with Himself—that is based on His works and not ours.

Salvation (eternal life in Heaven) is by faith alone through Christ alone.

And when we lack faith in Christ alone—we start to do silly things.

Last Sunday, we learned how and why Jesus is greater than both Solomon and the Queen of Sheba.

We also learned how and why the Scribes and Pharisees demanded a Heavenly sign from Jesus.

LW KEYPOINT 1:

Signs are gifts of mercy; therefore, God doesn't perform them on demand.

God is not a cosmic vending machine.

LW KEYPOINT 2:

Asking (demanding) for a sign is a sign of our unbelief.

A true sign of our faith in God is reading *The Book* God gave us— over and over from cover to cover and experiencing God in a supernatural and personal way.

That's all a review from last week.

INTRODUCTION:

Today, Jesus provides another parable that strikes at the heart of our self-governed morals and religion.

And we have a front row seat as to why Jesus hates religion. today.

We're going to see how manmade religion is about morality.

Morality - A system of moral conduct. virtues, character, integrity, ethics

We're going to see how our own personal morals don't give us a ticket to Heaven.

Quite the opposite, in fact— Jesus shows us that living a life based on what we think is good or bad simply paves a one-way road to a very real place called hell.

Because good people don't go to Heaven—only forgiven sinners do.

Now, today is a strange passage—

Today, Jesus points us back to the miracle He performed in —verses 22-32.

That's where Jesus healed a blind and deaf man who was possessed by a demon.

So this is His conclusion to that miraculous healing.

Ultimately, today's passage shows us the consequences of trying to be a good person.

Please stand for the reading and honoring of God's Word.

SCRIPTURE:

Matthew 12:43— "When an unclean spirit comes out of a person, it roams through waterless places looking for rest but doesn't find any.

Matthew 12:44— Then it says, 'I'll go back to my house that I came from.' Returning, it finds the house vacant, swept, and put in order.

Matthew 12:45— Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and settle down there. As a result, that person's last condition is worse than the first. That's how it will also be with this evil generation."

These are the very words from the authoritative, inerrant, inspired, and infallible Word of Almighty God.

PRAY:

Lord, you have treated your servant well, just as you promised. Teach me good judgment and discernment, for I rely on your commands. (Psalm 119:65-66)

EXEGESIS:

Matthew 12:43— "When an unclean spirit comes out of a person, it roams through waterless places looking for rest but doesn't find any.

If you flip back to verse 22, you'll remember that this is where Jesus healed a man who was demon-possessed.

Matthew 12:22—Then a demon-possessed man who was blind and unable to speak was brought to him. He healed him, so that the man could both speak and see. *Jesus*

And this miracle get's the crowd's attention.

It's wonderful that Jesus has saved this man physically—but here in verse 43, which may be 15 or 20 minutes later—Jesus says, *'Yes, the miracle is wonderful, but not so fast.'*

Jesus begins to teach in a parable (a story with a hidden meaning).

And Jesus wants the man he just healed, the crowd, along with the Scribes and Pharisees, to realize that freedom from demon possession is not enough.

Matthew 12:43(a)— *"When an unclean spirit comes out of a person,*

Here we meet the main character of Jesus' parable—an unclean spirit.

The 'unclean spirit' is a demon.

Why doesn't Jesus just say, 'demon?' Because it's part of his parable.

There's a comparison and contrast between clean and unclean/good and evil/moral and spiritual throughout this entire chapter.

Jesus doesn't say how this demon went out of the possessed man.

Regardless, it left him and that's great news.

We don't know why or how the demon left this man because Jesus doesn't say; however, the point is that this man made a moral decision.

And that moral decision to become a better person has temporarily freed this man from the demon's presence and influence.

Matthew 12:43(b)— it (Unclean Spirit/Demon) roams through waterless places...

Your translation may say 'dry places' instead.

In Jesus' day, people associated demons with the wilderness.

Waterless/dry places represent desolation, barrenness, and extreme discomfort.

For example, Jesus was tempted by Satan while fasting in the wilderness.
(Matthew 4:1)

Matthew 12:43(b)— it roams through waterless places looking for **rest** but doesn't find any.

This kind of rest is not physical rest like we need as humans.

Demons are spirits and don't need food and water or physical rest.

Keep in mind that a demon's purpose is to torment other people.

Let me touch on a theological issue called 'demonology.'

/study of demons

A demon's mission is to steal, kill and destroy because people are made in the image of God. (John 10:10).

In ways we don't understand, Scripture reveals that demons crave a physical body—so this demon is 'restless.'

He has found no rest because he hasn't found another physical body to torment.

If demons can't find people, they'll look for animals—remember when Jesus cast a bunch of demons into a herd of pigs? (Matthew 8:31).

Isn't it interesting that demons would rather be attached to a pig than exist unattached to anything?

Matthew 12:44(a)— Then it says, 'I'll go back to my house that I came from.'

Notice how the demon calls this person who is made in the image of God 'my house.'

This man was not his own—the demon owned his body.

That's why it's called demon possession—the demon possesses its victim.

Matthew 12:44(b)—Returning, ^{Demon} it finds the house vacant, swept, and put in order.

This also seems like great news—this man ^{made} some changes to his life.

Jesus doesn't say within the parable, but let's pause and use our sanctified imaginations ~~here~~—

Maybe this man hit hard times—and he made the moral and conscious decision to clean his life up.

Have you been there? I have.

I was 30 years old and just went through my second divorce.

I was broke, depressed and far away from God—and I thought to myself, "self, you're life is a trainwreck."

So I can relate to this guy, *3 his desire for change*

Maybe he decided that he was going to turn his life around.

He's going to pull himself up by his own bootstraps—quit drinking.

He's going to quit:

- watching pornography.
- gambling.
- overeating.
- *All the Above*

He wants to become a good person.

Maybe somebody shared the Gospel with him and he doesn't want to go to hell.

Maybe he confessed his sins and was baptized.

And all those things are great things—but this man still has a very big problem.

The demon's house is vacant—this man's life is still unoccupied and empty—even after deciding to make a few moral choices for the better..

Some things were put in order—his house was swept.

Meaning that he, like many of us, can manage our sinful behaviors for a short time.

In other words, he rearranged the dirt—aka sin— by making empty promises he could never fulfill.

In the addiction world where I came from, this is what we like to call “white-knuckling it.”

I'm going to do it this time—I know I said it in the past, but I really mean it—I'm going to stay sober. I really am going to change!

And “white-knuckling it” works temporarily.

The problem is that we’re trying to be moral through sheer will power.

We’re resting, counting, and betting on our own righteousness, moral performance, and works.

“White-knuckling it” is when you go to an AA meeting and everyone introduces themselves and proudly announces how long they’ve been sober—

Ex:

The problem is that he’s got a cup of coffee in one hand and a cigarette in the other.

It’s not a true form of freedom—it’s simply a transition to a lesser form of bondage.

So all that to say this—when the demon left this man, this man’s life was changed for the better—but only temporarily.

His life was still empty—which caused a bigger problem.

Matthew 12:45(a)— *Then (the demon) goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and settle down there.*

This is not good—the demon now has roommates.

This man is now ~~much~~ worse off by trying to clean himself up morally.

Matthew 12:45(b)— *Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself,*

Jesus teaches us an important theological lesson here.

The first demon is not as evil as his seven demon buddies.

Notice the number seven.

In Scripture, seven in the number of perfection.

And in this case, a perfection of evil has just entered this man and taken up residence.

In other words, ^{this man's} ~~his~~ opinion and personal morality (good deeds, religion) failed him.

Matthew 12:45(c)— and they enter and settle down there.

Squatters moved in.

It was easy for all the demons to enter this man's life—their house. Why?

Because no one was guarding it.

There was no one stronger protecting the man from such evil.

And if you are a born-again Christian, you don't need to worry about being possessed by a demon because the moment you believe the Gospel, the Holy Spirit moves into your house.

You have the Spirit of God living with you and in you—protecting you from this wickedness.

KEYPOINT 1:

There is no such thing as 'self-help.'

It's one thing to go the self-help section in the bookstore and learn how to create a spreadsheet—but it's impossible with salvation.

This man's willingness to try and reform himself—to become a better person—is a check he can write— but can't cash.

Personal reformation (aka religion and morality) could clean his house, but it's not sustainable.

Morality gives us a false sense of security.

But the reality is that we can't manage sin—and managing sin is the lie of morality.

KEYPOINT 2:

We don't need sin managed—we need sin forgiven.

And there is only one God-Man who is not only our Savior, but High Priest who can do that—the Lord Jesus Christ.

Matthew 12:45(d)— *As a result, that person's last condition is worse than the first.*

As a result of doing things his own way...

As a result of thinking that he can become a good person apart from the grace of God...

As a result of not submitting to the Lordship of Christ...

His moral condition is now worse than when he began.

He thought he had problems when he first stated this deal—now, his problems are multiplied sevenfold.

Here's the other thing about moral, self-righteous, religious people—

Even though their condition is worse than ever, many times, they don't even know it—because morality desensitizes people to sin.

He is like a leper who can't feel his hands or feet because the disease has taken away the pain—although he is in desperate need of medical help.

The same thing happens spiritually—because moral people live according to their ~~morals~~—they're blinded by their own self-righteous deeds they perform.

Virtues
Ethics



Matthew 12:45(e)— *That's how it will also be with this evil generation."*

Jesus is speaking to the Scribes and Pharisees, but it's also a warning to us today.

That's how it will be—worse off than before.

What's Jesus' point of His parable?

Jesus was describing the unteachability of the Scribes, Pharisees and their congregations.

They were only content with cosmetic changes.

They were not interested in the repenting from their sin or surrendering to the Lord Jesus which brings about true life.

+ Surrender = MATT 6:33 = seek first God = His righteousness.

+ **PREACH:** [BAPTISM]

↓
The Lord teaches us how to live.

Why does Jesus hate man-made morality and religion?

Answer: Because its a lie that sends people straight to hell.

Have you ever considered why there are so many "religions?"

~~Many~~ religions are founded on half truths—which Satan loves.

The half truth bing you have to be a good person and do good works.

KEYPOINT 3:

Good people don't go to Heaven—only forgiven sinners do. (from 3:12)

Unfortunately, there are many religious people in hell.

Did you know that there are two types of people in hell?

First, those who weep and, second, those who gnash their teeth. (Matt 8:12)

Those who weep died and came to God on their own terms—their own personal morality.

And their morality wasn't perfect—^{because} ~~therefore~~ the debt for their sin was never paid.

So they themselves will pay that debt in a very real place called hell—Jesus will say to them, ***"I never knew you—you lawbreakers."*** (Matt 7:23).

Those who gnash their teeth have always hated Jesus for his holiness, perfection, and moral purity.

Isn't it interesting that Jesus had little trouble reaching prostitutes, thieves, murderers, and the outcasts of society?

But it was nearly impossible for Jesus to reach the "good upstanding citizens" in the first century—the religious and moral people. Why?

Because they were deceived by their "good deeds."

They lowered God's standard of holiness and raised their own standard of self-righteousness.

They had some deeply held religious beliefs—but they were wrong.

They refused to recognize their sin and saw no need for a Savior.

And this is why the cross is mandatory.

When we believe the Gospel—our sins are transferred to Christ because Christ experienced God's wrath ~~on~~ ^{for} our sin on the cross.

Jesus ~~has~~ paid our sin debt. — And then walked out of the grave to prove it.

But it doesn't stop there—there is also a transferring (imputation) of Christ's perfection back to us.

Christ lived a life we couldn't and died a death that he shouldn't—but He did.

So that when we as Believers stand before God on judgment day—we stand clothed in the person and work of Christ.

But wait, there's more!

When we are converted, the Spirit of God comes to live inside us.

And where the Spirit of God dwells, no demon can reside.

Where the Spirit of God is—there is freedom! (2 Cor. 3:17).

Two things to consider:

First, ask for forgiveness—your morality, self-righteousness and religion.

Second, there are many opportunities to engage in this religious and moral conversation today in our culture and with our friends, families and neighbors.

When you tell people that, "God hates religion!" — you're going to get a response.

Let's pray for a Gospel centered conversation this week so others can experience the grace and the freedom that God has given us.



PRAYER



BAPTISM



BENEDICTION

(May) the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philip 4:7)

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