

## “Not Demonic, but Davidic!”– Matthew 12:22-37

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*[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, [www.welovethegospel.com](http://www.welovethegospel.com).]*

Grab a Bible and meet me in Matthew 12...

[Deacon Process and Introductions]

Let's take a look once more at this passage in Matthew 12. It will take us a few weeks to get all the way through these verses, this being our second week, but we are slowly working through them. Our focus will be on verses 28 to 30 today, but for the sake of context, let's read the whole section. I'll begin reading in verse 22. Follow along as I do...

*“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. <sup>23</sup> And all the people were amazed, and said, ‘Can this be the Son of David?’ <sup>24</sup> But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, ‘It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons.’ <sup>25</sup> 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. <sup>26</sup> And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? <sup>27</sup> And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. <sup>28</sup> But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. <sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. <sup>31</sup> Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. <sup>32</sup> 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. <sup>33</sup> Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. <sup>34</sup> You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. <sup>35</sup> The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. <sup>36</sup> I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, <sup>37</sup> for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.’” (Matthew 12:22-37)*

This is God's Word...

Now then, as we have noted, the story that launches this large block of teaching is pretty simple. A blind and mute man is brought to Jesus since he cannot come to Jesus on his own. Jesus cast out a demon that has been oppressing the man, which in turn restores him physically. The crowd for the most part is amazed. The Pharisees, who have been plotting against Jesus, are threatened and begin to circulate rumors that Jesus is actually doing these miracles by the power of the Beelzebul, which is a term here used for Satan. But Jesus knows what they are up to and quickly corrects them, making them look pretty foolish in the process.

When we first looked at the passage we considered how...

**Jesus Exposes the Pharisees: The Stupidity of Their Accusation**

We saw in particular that Jesus' argument shows that...

*Their Accusation Is Illogical: Would Satan Fight Against Himself? (vv. 25-26)*

*Their Accusation Is Inconsistent: What About Their Own Alleged Exorcisms? (v. 27)*

You can get on our website and review that sermon if you missed it. Today we want to push further into this passage and discover what Jesus now exposes about Himself...

### **Jesus Exposes Himself: The Significance of His Actions**

Essentially, Jesus is here dispelling the rumors and helping the crowd to understand what His actions actually signify. I initially said that there were three things I wanted to point out, but I've since divided the first point into two, so now there are four in total. Here's the first one...

*Jesus' Actions Evidence Divine Activity (v. 28)*

Here we see Jesus turning the Pharisees' assumption against them. They believe that the power to cast out a demon must derive from either the devil or the divine. Jesus has just shown how illogical and inconsistent it would be to conclude that He has delivered this man by means of Satanic power, which in turn backs the Pharisees into a corner, forcing them to consider that Jesus is actually acting by the power of God. "It is not demonic power but divine presence" that best explains the facts on the ground.<sup>1</sup>

He doesn't push too hard on this point yet to show that He is, in fact, Immanuel—God with us, God incarnate—but this is something that the readers of Matthew's Gospel will pick up on along the way. For now, Jesus simply invites these religious leaders to consider the irony that they—in attributing the work of Jesus to the devil—may actually themselves be doing the devil's work. If Jesus is acting by the power of God, then the gossip and activity of these men puts them in direct opposition to the purposes of God. They may think they are on God's side, but they are actually serving the evil one and their own agendas (cf. Matt 7:21-23).

In any case, they are not advancing God's kingdom. Jesus is. And Jesus makes this clear in verse 28, when He says, "*But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.*"<sup>2</sup> And this leads to the second thing that Jesus' actions reveal...

*Jesus' Actions Evidence Kingdom Entry (v. 28)*

When Jesus suggests that it is by the Spirit of God that He casts out demons, He is not simply trying to show that His ministry is divinely sanctioned. He is showing that His ministry is messianic. The mention of "*the Spirit of God*" harkens back to verse 15 and following, where Matthew showed that Jesus was fulfilling prophecy related to the promised Messiah. Quoting Isaiah 42, Matthew writes,

*"Jesus, aware of this [i.e., the Pharisees plotting to destroy Him], withdrew from there. And many followed him, and he healed them all <sup>16</sup> and ordered them not to make him known. <sup>17</sup> This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: <sup>18</sup> '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. <sup>19</sup> He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets; <sup>20</sup> a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory; <sup>21</sup> and in his name the Gentiles will hope.'" (Matthew 12:15-21; cf. Isaiah 42:1-3 [42:4 LXX])*

Matthew is showing in this section (and others) that Jesus is actually ministering in the power of the Spirit. Indeed, He is doing so in a way that actually fulfills various prophecies about the Messiah, the anointed one, who was anointed with God's Spirit.<sup>3</sup> And if He is the Messiah (i.e., the Christ), then He is the promised son of David, the promised and anointed King sent to establish an everlasting Kingdom, the fulfillment of God's covenant with David. The actions of Jesus, in other words, are not demonic. They're Davidic!<sup>4</sup>

You may not remember this but right before the story of David and Goliath, we are told that David has come into the service of King Saul, Israel's first king. And the text says,

*“And whenever the harmful spirit from God was upon Saul, David took the lyre and played it with his hand. So Saul was refreshed and was well, and the harmful spirit departed from him.”* (1 Samuel 16:23)

So David, the newly anointed King, was known for his power over demons, delivering even Saul from this harmful spirit, not unlike how our story in Matthew 12 begins with Jesus delivering a man from demonic affliction. And what do the people say when Jesus delivers the man? Look at verse 23. *“Can this be the Son of David?”* They are looking at the activity of Jesus in amazement, thinking that He is looking more and more Davidic. Could He be the promised Son of David? Could He be the King God told us to expect?

Matthew told us the answer to that question in the very first verse of his Gospel, when he introduces Jesus to us as *“the son of David”* (Matt 1:1) and then proceeds to offer a genealogy that is arranged with David at its center, through a triad of 14 names, a number which itself points to David (see sermons online). And here in Matthew 12, Jesus is confirming the suspicions of the crowd in verse 28, where He says, *“If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.”*

The Pharisees were missing the significance of Jesus' actions and their connection with the kingdom of God. They were meant to signify the arrival of God's kingdom, a topic that has generated a lot of confusion in our day, since there is some sense in which His kingdom is “already” and another sense in which it is “not yet” (in theology this “already/not yet” idea is referred to as inaugurated eschatology). R. C. Sproul gets at this when he wrote the following:

*“Sometimes the idea is put forth that the kingdom of God is already come in its fullness and nothing is yet to happen. The New Testament view is that the kingdom of God has been inaugurated, having made its advent with the entrance of Jesus to the world. He was elevated to the right hand of the Father and crowned as King of kings and Lord of lords. But His kingdom has not yet been consummated. We still have a future hope—the return of our Lord Jesus Christ, when all things will be given over to Him. So, if we have this confusion, it is perhaps understandable that the Pharisees could be mistaken about the kingdom. That is why Jesus warned them so sternly. It was as if He were saying: ‘Wake up. Pay attention. You’re missing it. Not only that, you’re opposing it. The kingdom is here. The display of My power shows it beyond all doubt.’”<sup>5</sup>*

Do you see? If the kingdom of God has come, then so has the King, David's greater son. The King brings the Kingdom. You can't have one without the other. And one of these things that this One-greater-than-David has come to do is plunder the kingdom of Satan, which the next verse shows. This leads to the third lesson we are to learn from our passage this morning, namely...

#### *Jesus' Actions Evidence Satan's Inferiority (v. 29)*

Jesus hits the Pharisees with an analogy in verse 29 that helps explain what He's up to: *“[H]ow 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.”* In this metaphor, the “strong man” represents Satan/Beelzebul, and the “strong man's house” represents the world. The one who breaks in and “plunder[s]” is Jesus. Together, the imagery is meant

to picture the Son of God coming into Satan's domain (the world) and taking what Satan has in his possession, like the possessed man who Jesus restored, which set off this whole exchange in the first place.

I'm not sure how many criminals we have among us, but typically if you are going to rob someone you do it under the cover of night or by brute force. You don't enter a strong man's house by the front door and say, "Wow, that's a really nice TV, so why don't you go make a sandwich while I take it from you, along with anything else I notice that seems valuable." Do that and you're likely to learn something of that man's strength. Instead, if you are going to enter when he is home, you have to subdue him first, restraining him so he cannot protect his home and possessions. That is essentially what Jesus did in setting the blind and mute man free. He entered Satan's house, tied him up and took his stuff. And he did it in broad daylight, with no trouble whatsoever. What does this show? It shows, among other things, that Satan may be strong, but he's no match for Jesus. And if, as the Pharisees reasoned, the only one stronger than the devil was God, then Jesus, ipso facto, must be doing divine work when He exerts His power over Satan in this miracle (cf. Isa. 49:24-25).<sup>6</sup>

And Jesus has been demonstrating this power repeatedly in His ministry. He's been restoring the sick, delivering the possessed, raising the dead, rescuing spiritual POWs, all the while Satan seems to be MIA. But he's there. He just can't do anything about it. Because all of these testify to a singular reality: "One who is stronger than the devil is here!"<sup>7</sup> His kingdom is advancing. It's advancing forcefully.<sup>8</sup> And no one knew that better than Satan, the strong man bound in the corner who Jesus has been plundering at will. Therefore, the Pharisees got Jesus all wrong. "He does not serve Satan; He conquers him," demonstrating, "that God has entered the world with power in Jesus' mission."<sup>9</sup>

And, by the way, this is also the story of Christian mission in general. The same Spirit is still plundering the strong man's house, encroaching on Satan's turf. As another pastor put it,

"[A]s the gospel goes to the nations, people are being freed from the clutches of Satan everyday....As the gospel goes forth, people are hearing the gospel and being cured of spiritual blindness. The Bible tells us that Satan is the god of this world and he has blinded the minds of unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ (2 Cor. 4:4). But when the gospel goes forth to the nations and people believe, the light of the gospel shines in people's hearts (4:6). They're freed from Satan's clutches. Missions work is war. Our missionaries are storming the gate of hell. When you pray for our missionaries, remember that our battle is not against flesh and blood. It's a spiritual battle against Satan and his demons. Pray that the sword of the Spirit will prove victorious in the battle."<sup>10</sup>

Amen. We ought to pray like this. And we ought to remember that the same truth applies to our circle of ministry, the places God has positioned us for mission work. Don't be "*ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes*" (Rom 1:16). When you share it with the lost in your life, some of them will respond in faith and experience God's power to save. Satan can't stop that. As John said, "*He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world*" (1 John 4:4). Share the gospel with the confidence that it is the power of God and no one, not even Satan, can keep God from saving His people.

But God has not called us to sit on the sidelines. He has put his people in the game, passed us the "Rock" on which He builds His church. We are called to share the good news that Christ has died to save. Sinners need to know, like you and I needed to know, that they cannot save themselves. Their sins separate them from a holy God. But this God, in His mercy, made a way for them to be forgiven and brought into a right relationship with Him. The way is Jesus. God the Son entered into the world, taking on our humanity—God became man; fully God, fully man—that He might offer His sinless self up as a sacrifice in our place and make atonement for our sins. He died on the cross to save those who believe on Him. He rose to life three days later to make them right with God. And He lives today, saving every person who would trust in Him alone to save. So the invitation of the Gospel is simple—turn from your sin and self-reliance (that's repentance), and admit your need for a Savior, trusting in Christ alone to save (that's faith). Trust Him to save and He will do it. All of it. It is finished.

You can experience His salvation today, if you would call upon Him to save you. Will you? Are you tired of carrying that sin, that guilt and shame? Then receive Jesus as Lord. Receive the grace of His salvation. You don't deserve it, but He delights to give it. He would forgive all your sins, and take you into His family as His child. So trust in Christ today. He is the only way.

And because He is the only way, what Jesus says next in our text is so vital for us to understand. He doesn't mince words in verse 30, where He says, "*Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters*" (Matt 12:30; cf. Mark 9:40). This brings us to the final point for today...

### *Jesus' Actions Exclude Human Neutrality (v. 30)*

I was reading something this past week that spoke about how polarized our society has become—where everyone wants you to pick a side on things—and yet this constant pressure leads a great many to land in what is sometimes called “the virtuous middle.” In political terms, for instance, this is why we have moderates. They align neither with Democrats nor Republicans. Another example given was from the realm of theological discourse, where one Christian might ask another, “Are you a Calvinist or an Arminian?” and the response given might be, “Neither, I’m a Calminian!” You get the idea. Many people like to gravitate to the middle because they don't like to fight with people. And the writer acknowledged that, “Sometimes the middle ground is the wise course of action. It shows humility and nuanced perspective. It shows a desire to be irenic and not divisive. But the moderate position is not always the best position.”<sup>11</sup>

Well, friends, our text illustrates one of those times. If Jesus is who He claimed to be in His ministry, then there is no room for neutrality. As someone else has said, “There are no Switzerlands in this war.”<sup>12</sup> You're either part of God's kingdom, or you're not. And if you're not, then your kingdom is of the devil. That's why opposition to Jesus can be so damning (as the next verses will show). But what you need to understand today is that so can neutrality. Why? Because, in truth, it doesn't exist. What Jesus said to these Pharisees, He could just as easily say to us: “*Whoever is not with me is against me...*”

As James Montgomery Boice explains,

“The reason for this is that Jesus always demands a decision. He requires a deliberate submission to his rule. He calls us to deny ourselves, take up our crosses, and follow him (Matt. 10:38). If we do not submit to Jesus' rule, we are not “for” Jesus. We are resisting him.”<sup>13</sup>

But in my experience this is not how people today think about Jesus. So many seem to want to remain neutral about Jesus—at least for the time being—so that they can, on the one hand, live their life however they want and, on the other hand, leave open the door to get right with Jesus later. They seem to have convinced themselves that this is somehow a better approach than the person who outright and publicly rejects Jesus, not realizing that their delayed decision is essentially the same decision. A decision against Jesus for the time being is still a decision against Jesus. You still remain an ally to Satan. And such a decision may harden the heart.

Do you remember the story of Pilate, when Jesus was on trial before His crucifixion? Jesus was brought before Pilate—the government official needed to grant approval for Jesus' execution—and Pilate questions him, but can't find any reason to have Jesus killed as the mob wanted. So he tells them, “*I find no guilt in this man*” (Luke 23:4). The crowd is not satisfied with that, so they protest some more, saying, “*He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place*” (23:5). Upon hearing this, Pilate thinks he has dodged a bullet because Galilee is Herod's jurisdiction, so he quickly sends Jesus to Herod. Crisis averted. Or so he thought.

But you see when Jesus stands before Herod, who happened to be in Jerusalem at the time (23:7), Herod mocks Him and roughs Him up a bit, only to send Him back to Pilate. So now Jesus is Pilate's problem again. So again Pilate goes before the people and says,

*“You brought me this man as one who was misleading the people. And after examining him before you, behold, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him. <sup>15</sup> Neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Look, nothing deserving death has been done by him. <sup>16</sup> I will therefore punish and release him.”* (Luke 23:14-15)

Yet the people are not satisfied with this. They want Jesus dead. They will settle for nothing less. But Pilate, for whatever reason, doesn't feel good about greenlighting the murder of an innocent man (or at least this innocent man), but fortunately he comes up with an alternative plan to put the decision back on the people. Matthew tells us:

*“Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release for the crowd any one prisoner whom they wanted. <sup>16</sup> And they had then a notorious prisoner called Barabbas. <sup>17</sup> So when they had gathered, Pilate said to them, ‘Whom do you want me to release for you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?’ <sup>18</sup> For he knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered him up. <sup>19</sup> Besides, while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, ‘Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much because of him today in a dream.’ <sup>20</sup> Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus. <sup>21</sup> The governor again said to them, ‘Which of the two do you want me to release for you?’ And they said, ‘Barabbas.’ <sup>22</sup> Pilate said to them, ‘Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?’ They all said, ‘Let him be crucified!’ <sup>23</sup> And he said, ‘Why? What evil has he done?’ But they shouted all the more, ‘Let him be crucified!’*

*<sup>24</sup> So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, ‘I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves.’ <sup>25</sup> And all the people answered, ‘His blood be on us and on our children!’ <sup>26</sup> Then he released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified.”* (Matthew 27:15-26)

Pilate, at least when it came to Jesus, was indecisive. He didn't want to make a decision about Jesus, so he sent Jesus to Herod. When Herod sent Jesus back, Pilate still didn't want to make a decision about Jesus so pleaded with the people. When that didn't work, Pilate tried to put the decision back on the people in a way designed to assuage his conscience—so he at least didn't feel like he did Jesus wrong. And when the people, to Pilate's shock and horror, chose to execute Jesus and free Barabbas, Pilate washes his hands before the crowd and says, “I'm innocent. His blood is on your hands. You decided, not me.” That's what an indecisive person does with Jesus.

But you know what? Pilate was wrong. He was no more innocent in the matter than the mob. His indecision was a decision, a decision against Jesus. Many people today are trying to walk the line with Jesus—avoiding a decision, putting it off until later—but a “no” to Jesus today is still a “no” to Jesus. It's remaining allies with the devil, working against the Lord. There is no neutrality. Indecision is a decision, it's just not the right decision. That's why today is the day of salvation, because tomorrow is no guarantee for you. Today is what you have. It could be all you have. So we must trust in Jesus. Bow the knee. Count the cost. And follow Him. Not tomorrow. Today.

So I guess the question is, “Whose side are you on?”<sup>14</sup> You must pick a side. Don't be like Pilate. Neutrality is not an option. He is not inviting you to come. He commands us to come (Acts 17:30). Don't turn from Jesus today, even in indecision. To do so is to reject the King of kings. So turn to Him in faith. And you will discover that He has met you already, right where you are.

Let's pray...

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<sup>1</sup> Grant R. Osborne. *Matthew*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 474.

<sup>2</sup> This translation hides the fact that the Greek puts more emphasis on Jesus as the one who casts out the demons. Perhaps this could be brought out by translating the first half of the verse, “But if it is by the Spirit of God that *I Myself* [ἐγὼ ἐκβάλλω] cast out demons...” Charles L. Quarles suggests that the emphatic pronoun (ἐγὼ) “implies that Jesus’s exorcisms were unique manifestations of the power of the Spirit” (*Matthew*, EGGNT [Nashville: B&H Academic, 2017], 130). Cf. Luke’s account of this story, where Jesus is recorded as having said, “*But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you*” (Luke 11:20). Concerning this, R. C. Sproul writes, “‘The finger of God’ was a metaphor for the Holy Spirit. The point is that Jesus’ ability to cast out demons ‘with a word’ (Matt. 8:16) was an unprecedented display of divine power and a clear evidence that the kingdom of God was present—just as John the Baptist had preached and just as Jesus had preached” (*Matthew*, SAEC [Wheaton: Crossway, 2013], 380). Daniel M. Doriani points out that Matthew’s use of “kingdom of God” here, instead of his more typical “kingdom of heaven,” may be for the sake of emphasis (“Matthew,” ESVEC [Wheaton: Crossway, 2021], 195-196). According to Osborne, “Here ‘God’ is used in antithesis to ‘Satan/Beelzebul’ in vv. 26-27, and ‘kingdom of God’ is opposed to ‘his kingdom’ in v. 27 (*Matthew*, 475 n. 15).

<sup>3</sup> Osborne writes, “Moreover, the presence of the Spirit is a direct claim by Jesus regarding his messianic status, for it was prophesied that God would endow the Messiah with the Spirit (Isa 11:2, 61:1–2; *Pss. Sol* 17:37; 18:7; *1 En.* 49:2–4; *T. Levi* 18:7)” (*Matthew*, 475).

<sup>4</sup> Quarles, *Matthew*, 132. Part 2 of his homiletical outline helped me think through the arrangement of the next few paragraphs related to Matt 12:28. This outline also led to the title of this sermon.

<sup>5</sup> Sproul, *Matthew*, 380. Osborne claims, “This is an important verse in Matthew’s kingdom theology, for while in 4:17 the kingdom was imminent (“it is near” [ἤγγικεν], see on that verse), here the kingdom has already “arrived” (ἐφθάσεν, an aorist emphasizing what has already taken place, possibly with a culminative force on the results of the arrival), thus an already/not yet format” (*Matthew*, 475).

<sup>6</sup> Rodney Reeves, *Matthew*, SGBC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 254.

<sup>7</sup> David Platt, *Exalting Jesus in Matthew*, CCE (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2013), 162.

<sup>8</sup> See James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of Matthew, Volume 1, The King and His Kingdom, Matthew 1-17* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001), 213.

<sup>9</sup> Doriani, “Matthew,” 196.

<sup>10</sup> Josh Black, “No Middle Ground,” accessed online at: <https://www.csmedia1.com/firstfreewichita.org/no-middle-ground.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Boice, 214.

<sup>14</sup> Black, “No Middle Ground.”