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March 24th, 2021

Matthew 12:1-50

Intro

I like things to be manageable, easy to understand and deal with. I love it when things just *work out exactly the way they're supposed to - according to plan!* And of course, what I often mean is, *according to my plan, my own expectations*. Sometimes it seems like nothing can stress me out more than having my own personal agenda - my plan for how things should go - to be upended. Nothing can frustrate me more than *being overwhelmed* by a task that I thought was going to be *easy and simple* - but then turns into an all day affair; which, unfortunately for me (and for my wife), tends to happen anytime I attempt *anything that involves manual labor*. I start a project around the house that I think will be quick, easy, and simple - and then, when it dawns on me that the building project is more complicated than I thought it would be, I quickly become *frustrated and annoyed*.

No one likes to be wrong; no one likes to fail. If there's something we have to do, then we want to *know what that is* and *be able to do it*. But if we're honest - if *I am honest* - this is oftentimes just an issue of *control*, isn't it? We don't like the feeling as if we're not in control of our lives; this feeling leads to stress, anxiety and frustration. We like to be the ones in charge of our lives, and we often buck against any outside authority trying to impose itself upon our lives.

But what do we do when that *outside authority* - that overwhelming, uncontrollable, complex, hard to understand, impossible-to-manage authority *buts into our lives*, upends all of our own plans, our own agenda and expectations, our own notions of what how things should be done, of what is right and wrong, of success and failure, telling us who we are and what we're supposed to do - *what do we do when that **authority intruding on our lives is the Lord Jesus Christ? The very authority of God?*** What if you catch a bigger glimpse of who Jesus is - and yet what you see there shakes the foundations of how you see the world, demanding that you look at things differently? How do you respond when you're confronted with a deeper, truer, more genuine and satisfying relationship with Jesus - but a relationship in which Jesus demands to *transform, change, and completely upend your comfortable life, your own agenda, and your own priorities?* It's an uncomfortable question that we have to ask ourselves: Do we know and worship the *real Jesus* - or just our own "version" of Jesus, one that's easy, manageable, and

comfortably fits into our own lives? The way we respond to these questions makes all the difference - *in fact, it determines who we are.*

In Matthew chapter 12, we see a drama of *conflict* unfold. There are three different *conflicts* that tie this chapter together; and all three conflicts revolve around *who Jesus is and challenges to Jesus's authority.* The first conflict revolves around the Sabbath day: the Pharisees accuse Jesus and His disciples of breaking the Sabbath - and therefore, of being *guilty law-breakers and sinners.* The Pharisees had meticulous rules about following the Sabbath that went far beyond what the Scriptures said in the Law of God. Jesus blows up their own control and authority with his claims and actions. IN the second conflict, right after Jesus performs a miracle of healing by delivering a demon-possessed man, the Pharisees respond by *accusing him of casting out demons by the authority of Satanic power.* They accuse Jesus of being demonic, not from God! They do not want to accept that His power is greater than Satan's, for then His authority would be greater than theirs. In the final conflict, the Pharisees demand a "sign" from Jesus, implying that none of the signs he has done so far are good enough to convince them; they are demanding he performs a sign that *meets their own expectations,* that fits into their plans and conforms to their understanding of scripture.

In each conflict, the Pharisees confront Jesus and challenge his authority and claims; then, Jesus responds by *revealing who He truly is* and showing how *his authority is far greater* than any other authority they could point to. THE Pharisees challenge Jesus by *accusing him* of not truly being of God, but of Satan; they reject him by claiming that Jesus is not good enough to truly be God's promised Messiah - the Savior. Yet He doesn't just refute their accusations by showing them how he meets their expectations - he shows them how greatly he *exceeds* their expectations! Jesus shows very clearly here that he is, indeed, God's promised Messiah: the true Prophet, Priest, and King; the true Temple and Lord of the Sabbath; the true servant of God and savior of the world; the true God! Jesus Christ is even *greater* than the Pharisees and Jews hoped or imagined the Messiah would be! And yet, that's exactly the problem for the Pharisees - he upends their expectations; he imposes His own authority on their lives. Yet they didn't want the real Jesus - they didn't want GOD's real, true promised Savior; they didn't want *God Himself.* They just wanted their own version of the Messiah, that neatly fit into their comfortable expectations, that conformed to their own worldview and understanding.

And so, Jesus hits the ball back into their court: Jesus responds to their confrontation by *showing just How great He is* - but then demands that the Pharisees respond to *Him*. In fact, He demands that *everyone* responds to Him. And he makes clear that the way we respond to who Christ is *determines who we are*: either His *enemies*, who are unforgiven, hopeless, and awaiting the wrath of God we deserve - or *completely forgiven of all our sins and brought into the very family of God*.

So then, the goal of this sermon this morning is for us to be confronted with these two realities: 1. Who Jesus is, and 2. How our response to Jesus determines who we are.

I. Who is Jesus? He is Even Greater than We Think

The first conflict of chapter 12 revolves around the Sabbath. We're introduced to it in the very first two verses: "At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, 'Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath.'" **(12:1-2)**. Here's what's going on here: Jesus and his disciples are walking through a field of grain and picked some off to eat as a snack. This was a common thing to do and was perfectly fine and legal for anyone to do, even in a field that didn't belong to them. That wasn't a problem. The problem was, this was a Sabbath. Under the Old Covenant Law, there was a *Sabbath day* every week: a day of rest, where no work was allowed to be done; this was to be taken very seriously, seen as a sign of the covenant and of faithful worship and obedience to God. However, by the time of Jesus, the Pharisees and scribes had developed a *very intense list of rules* for what qualified as work and what did not - and their list of rules went *far beyond* the commandments of God in the Law of the Bible! They were so meticulous that they considered leisurely snacking on grain to be "work" - even though this was by no means the same as the grueling work of actual farming!

So, they accuse Jesus and his disciples of breaking the Sabbath and the Law. Now, Jesus could have easily defended their actions by showing the Pharisees how they were wrongly interpreting the Old Testament and going beyond the Law of God with their own rules. However, he takes it a different direction: he does indeed show them that they aren't reading the Bible correctly - but their misinterpretation goes *far beyond* Sabbath regulations! He shows them that they're missing the *larger point* of the Law and the whole Old Testament: because the point is **Jesus Himself**. And so, Jesus begins to unfold this for them, by showing them *who He is*.

First, we see that...

A. Jesus is the Greater King (12:1-4, 42)

In verses 3 and 4, Jesus answers by saying, “Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God and ate the bread of Presence, which it was not lawful for him to eat nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests?” He’s referencing the story of **1 Sam. 21**, where David and his followers are fleeing King Saul and receive provisions from the Tabernacle. Yet the bread they received was *holy bread* - forbidden to be eaten by anyone but the priests. However, *David was a special person, with a special role* -He was the anointed one, to be God’s appointed King. Jesus’s point is that David’s unique role and circumstances made it allowable for him to eat the bread, which would otherwise have *not* been Lawful for him to do. And his larger point is this: *Jesus is greater than David!* He is the true promise Son of David - great David’s greater Son! He is the true promised King!

Jesus makes the same point later in the chapter in **v.42**. In the *third conflict* that arises, The Pharisees *demand a sign* of Jesus. And part of Jesus’s response is that they have already been given enough of a sign to believe because *Jesus Himself is a greater and wiser King than even King Solomon was!* King Solomon, David’s son and heir, was given *extraordinary wisdom* from God - so much so that he wrote *wisdom books* in the Bible - such as Proverbs, Wisdom inspired by the very Spirit of God! While Solomon was King, Israel flourished in prosperity; the nation was blessed, and Solomon was even a blessing to the nations! His wisdom was so renowned that the “queen of the South” - the distant “Queen of Sheba” - came to Solomon to glean from his wisdom (as we see in 1 Kings 10:1-13). Yet Jesus is not only a greater King than David and Solomon, but *even wiser than Solomon!* Why? Because *Jesus is the very Wisdom of God!* Jesus rebukes the Pharisees for not recognizing this, telling them that the Queen of Sheba will rise up and rebuke them on the day of judgment, for if she could recognize the wisdom of God in Solomon, than we are without excuse if we do not recognize *The Wisdom of God* in the flesh - Jesus Christ, the **truly Wise King!**

Jesus is far greater and wiser than we could ever possibly want, imagine, or hope for in any earthly, merely human king! He makes no mistakes. He has no flaws of pride, selfishness, or malicious intentions. He rules with complete righteousness, bringing true justice and righteousness to the whole world, as the **quotation from Isaiah in verses 18-21** makes clear;

indeed, he brings hope *to the Gentiles - the nations, in all the world!* The Pharisees were looking for a merely earthly king of the Jews; yet Jesus is far more, far greater than this! The true King over all the earth, the hope for all who turn to him in faith as His people!

But Jesus is also...

B. Jesus is Greater than the Priesthood and Temple (12:5-6)

Let's look back at the Sabbath conflict: Jesus gives a second reason in answer to the Pharisees' accusations in **vv.5-6**: He states that the Priests, under the Law, were exempt from the Sabbath rules because they were commanded by God to keep offering sacrifices and maintaining the Temple, even given specific things to do *every Sabbath*. And now, he declares: "I tell you, something greater than the temple is here." The priesthood made sacrifices on behalf of the sinful people of Israel, and were mediators between GOD and man; and yet, they, too, were sinners, who needed to be cleansed and have their sins atoned! Yet Christ is without sin. The Temple was like a new Garden of Eden - it was a palace where God dwelled among His people once again! And yet, *at a distance*. But Jesus CHrist *is the true temple*. He is God dwelling among His people in the flesh! And He is the true Priest. He brings God down to Earth so that He can bring sinful people up to Heaven - to dwell in the presence of God for eternity! And he does so by *dealing with our sin by offering the true and greatest sacrifice once and for all* - Himself, for our sins, on the Cross.

C. Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath (12:7-14)

The last reason Jesus gives in the first conflict is that He is the **Lord of the Sabbath**. He says this explicitly in **v.8**, then *demonstrates it* by healing a man on the Sabbath in **vv.9-14**. He has the ultimate authority to rightly interpret what is and is not Lawful to do on the Sabbath because *He himself is the Lord of the Sabbath!* This means a couple of *very significant things* for us: 1. First, this is nothing less than the claim that He is God. God Himself is the *Lord of the Sabbath*. 2. Secondly, this shows us that **the Law of the Sabbath was always meant to point us to Christ**. The Sabbath was meant to teach Israel to not trust in themselves *but in God alone*; to find their rest, not only from physical labor but from *the works of the Law*, by ***finding true rest in God***. ANd Jesus Himself *is the true Sabbath rest* - we find rest from the Law, which we cannot fulfill, buy *resting our weary souls in Christ, who fulfills the Law's demands in our place!*

As these verses are making clear, all of these major themes of the Old Testament scriptures *pointed to and were fulfilled in Christ*. And this is no less true for the *Prophets*.

D. Jesus is the Greatest Prophet and Sign (12:38-41)

Fast forward to the third conflict once more. They demand a sign from Jesus, but he tells them they will only get *the sign of Jonah (vv.40-41)*. Jesus is the true prophet, revealing the full message of God, *the gospel* - because *Jesus's life fulfills the gospel*. The sign of Jonah was this: he was swallowed by a large fish, and was as good as dead for three days; then, in a picture of resurrection, God spared his life, the fish spat him out, and Jonah obeyed God and went to Nineveh! Jonah preached to the enemies of Israel, Nineveh in Assyria - *and remarkably, they repented!* This was meant to be a picture of the *death and resurrection of Christ*, as Jesus reveals in **v.40** - "so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." The greatest prophetic sign, the most authoritative sign of GOD's true Word of salvation is this - that Jesus Christ died and was raised on the third day in our place - in the place of all who repent and believe in Him!

Why was this the greatest sign that Christ would give? Because...

E. Jesus is God's Gentle, Suffering Servant (12:15-21)

Matthew breaks from the narrative in **vv.15-21** to give us a long quote from **Isa. 42:1-3**. This part of Isaiah is known for telling us about the "Suffering Servant" - and this is undeniably **Jesus Christ**. We've seen that Jesus is the true Prophet, Priest, King! The true Temple and Sabbath - God Himself! Yet he brings about His Kingdom and promised salvation *through death on a cross!* And Matthew reminds us, once again, that this is because of the *gentleness driving Jesus's heart*. And the greatness of Christ is by no means diminished by his gentleness and kindness - it is only magnified! Jesus is *gentle and patient* towards hopeless, hard-hearted sinners like us - "a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench." This glorious King, the God-Man, *will be more gentle, gracious, and patient with you than you can imagine!* Simply trust that He proved this by *bearing your sin, guilt, shame, and death* upon Himself!

Application

Jesus is greater than anything in our lives; he blows up our expectations, upends our own agendas, and shakes the foundations of our comfortable lives. He's greater than we want him to be; Jesus does not fit neatly and comfortably into our lives; a genuine relationship with Christ is not easy, simple, and manageable. The greatness of Jesus turns our world upside down! As we

encounter who Christ truly is, His glory demands all of our attention, our mind, our whole heart and soul!

After all, the greatness of Christ *demands a response*. Which leads us to the second point...

II. How We Respond to Who Jesus Is Determines Who We Are

As we're confronted with who Jesus is, we're asked the question: How do you respond to Christ? This is the point on full display in the *second conflict* of the chapter, in **vv. 22-37**. Jesus miraculously heals a *demon-possessed, blind and mute man* (v. 22). But how do the Pharisees respond? They try to dismiss Jesus's power as being *demonic*, not from God. They claim that he "casts out demons" by "beelzebul, the prince of demons," a term referring to Satan. Jesus responds by refuting the logic behind such a claim: "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste," showing that it would make no sense for "Satan" to "cast out Satan." (v. 25-27).

But then he cranks up the volume; his argument gets straight to the point:

A. If We Reject Christ, We Are Unforgiven and Hopeless Enemies of God (30-32; 43-45)

Jesus's power is the very *power of God, the Holy Spirit*; by calling the spirit of Jesus Satan, the Pharisees are committing the *blasphemy of the Holy Spirit*. They are confronted with who Jesus is and the very power of the Holy Spirit, knowing that He is from God - and yet *they reject the Spirit of GOD and call Him evil*. Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, I believe, is to know and understand the truth of the gospel of Christ and yet *knowingly and willingly* reject and turn away from it; not simply choosing not to believe the gospel, but *understanding that it's true and still refusing, rejecting Christ, and walking away*. To call the Holy Spirit "evil," and to openly declare yourself an enemy of God. There is absolutely *no forgiveness or hope* for anyone who rejects Christ - **for the gospel of Christ is our only hope!**

There can be no neutrality in our relationship to Jesus; this is what **v.30** - we are either *with him* or *against him*. The way we respond to who Christ claims to be *determines who we are*. And our response is revealed *by our fruit*. As we see in **vv.33-37**, we're either *good trees producing good fruit*, or *bad trees producing bad fruit*. And the fruit of our lives - what we say and what we do - *reveals the treasure of our heart*: either the "good treasure" of repentance and faith, or the "evil treasure" of sin and hardened unbelief.

It's possible to pretend to be a believer, to even benefit from the Bible, Christ, and the Church - to have a better life, be a moral person, a "cultural Christian" - and yet not truly respond to Christ with repentant faith. Jesus warns us that this does us no good. We're either with him or against him. It's not enough to attend church or even be a member. We can't accept only part of Christ or the gospel. Only being a "partial Christian" makes us like the man of **vv.43-45**: the unclean spirit leaves him for a time, then returns; and finding the "house" of the person "empty, swept, and put in order," it "goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself." This is a stark warning for us: *if we reject Christ, if we only accept what is comfortable for us, and think that we're OK* - we're only hardening our hearts, settling into a "comfortable life" that is *evil*. If you reject Christ, and refuse to repent and believe in Him, *you will never find forgiveness for your sin, guilt, and shame*. If you reject Christ, he will reject you, and you will face the *eternal wrath of God against your sin in Hell*.

B. If We Repent and Believe, We Are Jesus's Family (46-50)

And yet, we can't miss what Jesus says - *everything else will be forgiven for those who respond in faith!* The warning of **vv. 31-32** is jarring; we're often so distracted by the "unforgivable sin" that we miss the absolute beauty of what Christ tells us just before that: "Therefore, I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people..." There is *unending mercy, grace, and forgiveness* for us in Christ Jesus, against *every sin imaginable* - from anger to lust, from adultery and divorce to stealing and idolatry, even from blasphemy against the name of Christ at some point in our past - ***but only for those truly repent and believe in Christ!***

This means that if you're in Christ this morning - if you see who Christ is by faith and are responding by *clinging to His glorious grace* in repentant faith - then we are *completely forgiven* from all of our sins - past, present, and future!

This is true of us because of *who were become when we respond to Christ in faith*. Who are we in Christ? ***We are God's family!*** Chapter 12 ends with a story that makes this very point in a startling yet beautiful way. We see this in **vv.46-50**: "While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him. But he replied to the man who told him, 'Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?' And stretching out his

hand towards his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

We “do the will of God” by *responding to who Christ is in faith; by hearing the gospel, believing it, turning away from trusting in ourselves, sin, the world, and everything else - and trusting in Christ alone!* And when we believe, we are *firmly united to Christ by grace through faith!* We are *one with Him!* And being one with Him, we are *one with God!* We are adopted as God’s children; we join the very family of God! Jesus Christ is our older brother! We belong to the very household of God!

And this means we are also family with each other! We, **the church**, are a family - we are God’s children, brothers and sisters in Christ! We are united to each other because we are **family**. Even though we may have nothing else in common, if we have *faith in Christ* in common than we are ***closer to each other than our own blood relatives***. As one of my former pastors put it, “The waters of baptism are thicker than blood.”

Why is this the case? Because **the way we respond to who Jesus is determines who we are**. If we respond to the good news of Christ - that he lived, died, and was raised in our place to save us from our sins - by truly trusting and believing in Him, then we are *completely forgiven!* So much so, that our *entire identity changes*. We’re no longer under the condemnation of God, even though we deserve His judgment! We’re no longer labeled as *guilty sinners and enemies of God* if we’re in Christ Jesus! We’re no longer children of wrath! We are part of the very family of God in Christ Jesus!

Perhaps this morning you’ve been confronted with the greatness of Jesus Christ; perhaps you’ve also been confronted with the fact that you have not truly responded to Christ by following Him with all of your life in faith. I want to assure you this morning that *no matter what you’ve done - no matter how you’ve responded in the past, no matter how messed up or sinful you are - it is not too late for you!* YOU can be forgiven of **any and all sins in your life - past, present, and future!** You can join the very family of God! Simply rest in the grace of Jesus Christ, trusting that He is great enough to save you from your sin. Turn away from your sin, turn to Christ in faith, believe the gospel and ask him for forgiveness, and you will find it! Then, make your faith public through baptism and join a gospel-preaching church - a local family of God. If you have any questions about this - about becoming a Christian, baptism, or joining this

local church, I would love to speak with you. You can come now and wait on the front row, or find me after the service. Let us pray.