

Who Can Be In Jesus' Family?

Matthew 12:22-50

Key Verse: 12:50

“For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

We are living in times marked by relativism. The world has gotten smaller through the Internet, Facebook, Twitter and so on. We have come to realize that we should not insist on our cultural distinctions, but be open to people of other cultures who are quite different from us. We are living in a multi-ethnic, multi-religious world of diversity. Living in this environment, we are naturally influenced to think that there are many valid lifestyles and belief systems. People say, “You can believe what you want, and I will believe what I want. We are both okay. Let’s not bother each other.” In this social milieu, it is hard to say that any way is the only way. It is hard to make any serious commitments to a belief system. When someone commits to Jesus they are easily branded as narrow-minded and bigoted. But in today's passage, Jesus teaches us that spiritually speaking, there is no room for relativism. There are only two sides: Jesus’ side and Satan’s side; there is no middle ground. We all stand on one side or the other and the consequences are serious. Let's learn this spiritual reality, where we should stand, and what kind of commitment we should make.

I. Jesus works by the Spirit of God (22-37)

In this passage there is a contrast between the work of the Holy Spirit and the work of demons. In order to understand this passage, we need to understand the work of demons. According to Revelation 12:8-9, demons were angels created by God to do good. But they became proud and rebelled against God (Isa 14:14). Satan was the chief angel (referred to as “Beelzebul” in this passage). He was hurled to the earth along with all the rebellious angels. From that time, they were called demons. They are furious and try to lead the whole world astray. They accuse believers; they deceive people and try to destroy them by any means (Jn 8:44). Demons destroy not only people’s bodies, but their minds and souls as well. They blind the minds of people to the gospel and God’s presence (2 Cor 4:4). We should discern the work of demons for they masquerade as angels of light (2 Cor 11:14). Here Matthew relates blindness and muteness to the work of demons. People suffered from many kinds of diseases. We cannot say this about all their diseases, but in some cases, at the root, it came from demons.

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Look at verse 22. **“Then they brought him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see.”** A blind man is miserable. A blind man who is mute is even more miserable. He cannot verbalize his thoughts, feelings or agonies, and becomes extremely lonely - just watching life pass him by. Those who can see, hear and talk are blessed. Those who see the spiritual world, hear the words of God, and talk to God are even more blessed. So we should thank God for these things. When this man was brought to Jesus, Jesus healed him immediately out of great compassion. Now he could see and talk freely. Perhaps he testified to Jesus’ grace without stopping, for more than two hours. This was the really great work of God. It was possible only by the Holy Spirit. It was a clear sign that Jesus was the Messiah. In the world, there are many people like the blind and mute man. The spiritually blind cannot see God or his kingdom; they see only the darkness of the world. Muteness is often associated with deafness. The spiritually mute cannot hear many beautiful stories of God’s grace or sing praises to his name. They cannot speak spiritual words. This is caused by Satan, who closes their eyes and ears and mouths, making them miserable. Who can help such people? Only Jesus can. I was once like a spiritually mute man. Though I had many things in my mind and heart I could not speak freely. There may be many reasons for this, but at the root it was a spiritual problem. God’s servants, Dr. Samuel Lee and P. Abraham Kim, loved me like a son and helped me to come to Jesus. When Jesus touched my soul, my heart was set free and my tongue was loosed. Now I speak freely to many people all the time. Just last week, I spoke about Jesus to a sales clerk. She was so moved that she shed tears as she rang up my sale. Let’s bring the spiritually blind and mute to Jesus!

When Jesus healed this man, there were two responses. All the people were astonished and said, **“Could this be the Son of David?”** (23) They accepted Jesus as the Messiah and were ready to follow him. However, when the Pharisees heard this, their blood pressure rose. They felt greatly threatened and wanted to discredit Jesus by any means. They could not deny the fact that the man was healed by Jesus. So they fabricated a devious interpretation by saying, **“It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons”** (24). In this way they tried to deny the work of the Holy Spirit. They should have accepted Jesus as the promised Messiah. But they intentionally suppressed the truth because of jealousy.

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How did Jesus deal with them? Jesus did not become emotional and fight with them. Rather, Jesus began to defend the work of the Holy Spirit, logically and systematically, exposing that their words were irrational. Look at verse 25. **“Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, ‘Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand.’**” As we know, enemies within are more dangerous than enemies without. When the members of a kingdom, city or household are united, they are strong. But when they begin to fight with each other, it is the beginning of disaster for them. For many years, the Arab nations were strong and prosperous. But when the young generation in Egypt, Libya and Yemen rose up in opposition, those nations were divided and then the leadership toppled, and they are now in serious trouble. We all want our families to be happy and prosperous, and for our children to grow well. In order for this to happen, a husband and wife should become one (Gen 2:24). If they fight with each other, their family breaks and their children are badly wounded. **“United we stand, divided we fall.”** This principle applies in the spiritual realm as well. If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself, and his kingdom cannot stand (26). In verse 27, Jesus further exposed the irrationality of the Pharisees. Their arbitrary interpretation eliminated the basis for truth in their society. So their own disciples could be their judges.

After proving that his power source could not be demonic, Jesus clearly stated that it was the Spirit of God. Look at verse 28. **“But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.”** This implies that Jesus is the King who brings salvation and judgment. Those who accept Jesus as their king will receive salvation. Those who reject Jesus will be judged by God. So Jesus is the standard of salvation and judgment. In Luke 2:34, Simeon said that Jesus would cause the falling and rising of many in Israel. Peter developed this truth in the analogy of the cornerstone. To those who trust in Jesus, he is the source of salvation, and they will never be put to shame. But to those who reject him, he is the stone that causes men to stumble and the rock that makes them fall (1 Pe 2:6-8). It seems that there are many kingdoms in the world. But spiritually speaking, there are only two kingdoms: the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. We can understand them as the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness, the kingdom of love and the kingdom of hatred, the kingdom of life and the kingdom of death. The kingdom of Satan has power. That is why those trapped in his kingdom are suffering. The problem is that no one can escape from Satan’s kingdom by their own power. Only

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King Jesus, who exercises God's Almighty power against Satan, can set us free (Ac 10:38). The power of God is irresistible and overwhelms all opposition.

In order to emphasize that he is stronger than Satan, Jesus uses a metaphor in verse 29: **“Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can plunder his house.”** Here, Satan is the strong man and his possessions are people bound by his power like the blind and mute man. Jesus invaded Satan's territory, bound him up, and set the prisoners free. Of course, Satan resisted. But Jesus defeated him because Jesus is stronger. Through this we learn that to save one soul is to engage in spiritual warfare against Satan's power. That is why we must depend only on the power of the Holy Spirit. We should have a conviction by depending on the Holy Spirit, we will surely win the victory.

Jesus went on to warn the Pharisees that their blasphemy of the Holy Spirit was a very serious matter. Look at verse 30. **“Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.”** According to Jesus, there are only two kinds of people: those who are with Jesus, and those who are against Jesus; those who gather with Jesus, and those who scatter. Those who are with Jesus try to plant faith in Jesus by teaching the words of God, hoping in the kingdom of God, and loving their neighbors. They struggle to deny themselves to build up the kingdom of God. Through them, people can be saved. On the other hand, those who are not with Jesus are against Jesus. Some are subtle. They don't seem like Jesus' enemies, but they give bad influence to others. Others, like the religious leaders, intentionally try to destroy the work of Jesus. They plant doubt, fear and hatred. In the process, they damage people badly. Most of all, they slander the Holy Spirit, calling his work the work of Satan. Such people cannot be forgiven in this age, or in the age to come (31-32).

In verse 33, Jesus revealed their root problem by using the metaphor of a tree and its fruit. Their tree was bad, so their fruit was bad. In verse 34, Jesus called them, **“You brood of vipers...”** Their nature was evil like a poisonous snake. When they spoke what was on their hearts, it made everyone sick (34). The important thing is what we store up in our hearts. If we store up good things in our hearts, naturally we can produce good fruit, especially words of encouragement. But if we store up evil things in our hearts, we will naturally produce bad fruit, such as blasphemy and cursing

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(35). Jesus said that we will all give account on the day of judgment for every empty word we have spoken (36). Here, “empty word” does not mean merely trifling and insignificant words, but words of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit and slander against God’s children and work. So we should be careful what we say, because by our words we will be acquitted and by our words we will be condemned (37).

In this part, Jesus explained that the Pharisees slandered the work of the Holy Spirit because they were evil in their nature. They needed to be changed from within. Then they could bear good fruit. No one can change themselves. But when we accept Jesus as Christ and King, the Holy Spirit comes into our hearts and gives us new birth. We become a new creation; the old has gone and the new has come (2 Cor 5:17). Then we can speak and act in ways that please God and are a blessing to others.

II. Jesus foretold his resurrection as the sign of Jonah (38-45)

Despite Jesus’ strong warning, some Pharisees and teachers of the law continued to oppose Jesus. They came to him and said, **“Teacher, we want to see a sign from you”** (38). It was a demand that Jesus to prove his identity as the Messiah. Actually, they had already received a sign through the healing of the blind and mute man. But they ignored this sign. They suppressed the truth in their wickedness. Jesus saw them as representatives of that generation. Jesus rebuked their brazen presumption, **“A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah”** (39).

What is the sign of Jonah? Look at verse 40. **“For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”** Jonah was commissioned to tell the people of Nineveh that their city would be overthrown. But Jonah was very reluctant. So he got into a boat that sailed in the opposite direction. To make a long story short, he was thrown overboard and swallowed by a huge fish. Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the fish. Then it spit him out in the very place God wanted him to preach. This was a sign to the people of Nineveh. They recognized God’s work and repented. Jesus would die and be buried for three days and nights. Then he would be raised to life again. This is the sign of the Messiah. It declared Jesus to be the Son of God in power (Ro 1:4). The people of Nineveh saw the sign of Jonah and repented. The people of Jesus’ time saw

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a greater sign and did not repent. At the judgment, the men of Nineveh would stand up and condemn that wicked generation (41). The Queen of the South would also rise at the judgment and condemn them (42). The men of Nineveh and the Queen of the South were Gentiles. Gentiles who sincerely repented would rise to be saved. Then they would condemn the wicked generation of Israel who rejected the Messiah. Many people claim that if God gives them a sign they will believe. But God has already given the sign that Jesus died for our sins and rose again from the dead. Jesus' resurrection is the greatest miracle. All we need to do is repent and believe in Jesus, instead of asking for a sign.

In verses 43-45 Jesus explained what would happen to the generation that rejected the Messiah. Jesus had performed many miracles among them: driving out evil spirits and healing the sick. For a time, they were liberated and could experience God's deep grace. But they refused to accept Jesus as their King. They did not commit themselves to him. So they were unable to maintain this grace. They would become worse. Jesus illustrated this by comparing them to a man who had been freed from an impure spirit. When an impure spirit comes out of a person, it goes through arid places seeking rest but does not find it. Then it says, "**I will return to the house I left.**" It finds the house unoccupied. This means that the liberated person did not invite Jesus to come into their hearts as King. Such people are vulnerable. The impure spirit returned with seven other spirits more wicked than itself. The final condition of that person was worse than the first. Here we learn that there is no middle ground or neutrality in the spiritual realm. When Jesus does not rule our hearts as King, we are vulnerable to evil spirits. King Saul was reluctant to obey God's command. Then the Holy Spirit left him, and an evil spirit came in and began to torment him (1 Sa 16:14). Here we learn that when we receive Jesus' grace, we should commit ourselves to Jesus as our Lord and King. There is no neutral ground in the spiritual world. We will be ruled by Jesus or an evil spirit.

III. Jesus' true family (46-50)

Thus far Jesus talked to an evil generation. Now Jesus speaks to his disciples, who had committed themselves to him. Look at verses 46-47. As Jesus was talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. They thought Jesus was out of his mind (Mk 3:21). How did Jesus respond? Look at verses 48-50. Jesus replied, "**Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?**" Then Jesus pointed to his disciples

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and 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.**” Jesus’ disciples were ordinary country people. When he referred to them as his brothers, they must have felt honored and encouraged.

Here we learn the way of becoming Jesus’ family members. It is to do the will of God. What does it mean to do the will of God? **First of all we must recognize what God is doing.** Chapter 12 reveals that God sent Jesus as his chosen servant, the Messiah. To do God’s will is to accept Jesus. In John’s gospel, Jesus said, “**The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent**” (Jn 6:29). When we believe in Jesus, God gives us the right to become children of God (Jn 1:12). By the work of the Holy Spirit, we are born again as children of God (Jn 3:5; Gal 4:6). God rescues us from the dominion of darkness and brings us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, the kingdom of light (Col 1:12-13). We are completely delivered from Satan’s power and influence. We are welcomed into fellowship with God’s family members and can enjoy true freedom, joy and peace. We have real security and everlasting life. What a blessed life it is to be a member of Jesus’ family. John exclaimed, “**How great is the love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!**” (1 Jn 3:1).

In today’s passage we learn two things. **First, the kingdom of God is advancing through Jesus who works by the Holy Spirit.** When we look at the world, it is easy to think that the kingdom of Satan is strong and dominant. So many Christians are scared and have retreated from public witness. For example, many Christians have retreated from the Chicago public schools by sending their children to safe private schools and ignoring the public schools. So the public schools have become worse and worse. The administrators in these schools have recently realized that they need a better moral influence. They are open to working with churches to develop after school programs that enhance the morality and ethics of children. The problem is that Christians are deceived and scared and not ready to serve them. We should believe that the kingdom of God is stronger and it is advancing by the work of the Holy Spirit. We should boldly go to the public schools, and into other public arenas, to witness to the power of the kingdom of God.

Second, we need to commit ourselves to Christ and his kingdom. There are only two kingdoms: the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. We

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will belong to one or the other; there is no neutral territory. The consequences of this are serious. How can we belong to the kingdom of God? We need to commit ourselves to Jesus. Many people are afraid of making a commitment. They calculate and try to stand in the middle ground. But without a commitment to Jesus we will end up as the members of Satan's kingdom. We should commit ourselves to Jesus. Then we become the members of his royal family. We will enjoy his love and joy and peace as children of God. We will have final victory with him in glory forever. Let's commit ourselves to Jesus and become his family members.