

Week of May 2, 2021

Matthew 12:22-50

²² They brought to Jesus a demon-possessed man who was blind and unable to speak. Jesus healed him so that he could both speak and see. ²³ All the crowds were amazed and said, "This man couldn't be the Son of David, could he?" ²⁴ When the Pharisees heard, they said, "This man throws out demons only by the authority of Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons."

²⁵ Because Jesus knew what they were thinking, he replied, "Every kingdom involved in civil war becomes a wasteland. Every city or house torn apart by divisions will collapse. ²⁶ If Satan throws out Satan, he is at war with himself. How then can his kingdom endure? ²⁷ And if I throw out demons by the authority of Beelzebul, then by whose authority do your followers throw them out? Therefore, they will be your judges. ²⁸ But if I throw out demons by the power of God's Spirit, then God's kingdom has already overtaken you. ²⁹ Can people go into a house that belongs to a strong man and steal his possessions, unless they first tie up the strong man? Then they can rob his house. ³⁰ Whoever isn't with me is against me, and whoever doesn't gather with me scatters. ³¹ Therefore, I tell you that people will be forgiven for every sin and insult to God. But insulting the Holy Spirit won't be forgiven. ³² And whoever speaks a word against the Human One will be forgiven. But whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit won't be forgiven, not in this age or in the age that is coming. ³³ Either consider the tree good and its fruit good, or consider the tree rotten and its fruit rotten. A tree is known by its fruit. ³⁴ Children of snakes! How can you speak good things while you are evil? What fills the heart comes out of the mouth. ³⁵ Good people bring out good things from their good treasure. But evil people bring out evil things from their evil treasure. ³⁶ I tell you that people will have to answer on Judgment Day for every useless word they speak. ³⁷ By your words you will be either judged innocent or condemned as guilty."

³⁸ At that time some of the legal experts and the Pharisees requested of Jesus, "Teacher, we would like to see a sign from you." ³⁹ But he replied, "An evil and unfaithful generation searches for a sign, but it won't receive any sign except Jonah's sign. ⁴⁰ Just as Jonah was in the whale's belly for three days and three nights, so the Human One will be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights. ⁴¹ The citizens of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it as guilty, because they changed their hearts and lives in response to Jonah's preaching. And look, someone greater than Jonah is here. ⁴² The queen of the South will be raised up by God at the judgment with this generation and condemn it because she came from a distant land to hear Solomon's wisdom. And look, someone greater than Solomon is here. ⁴³ When an unclean spirit leaves a person, it wanders through dry places looking for a place to rest. But it doesn't find any. ⁴⁴ Then it says, 'I'll go back to the house I left.' When it arrives, it finds the place vacant, cleaned up, and decorated. ⁴⁵ Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself. They go in and make their home there. That person is worse off at the end than at the beginning. This is the way it will be also for this evil generation."

⁴⁶ While Jesus was speaking to the crowds, his mother and brothers stood outside trying to speak with him. ⁴⁷ Someone said to him, "Look, your mother and brothers are outside wanting to speak with you." ⁴⁸ Jesus replied, "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" ⁴⁹ He stretched out his hand toward his disciples and said, "Look, here are my mother and my brothers. ⁵⁰ Whoever does the will of my Father who is in heaven is my brother, sister, and mother."

A House Divided

Abraham Lincoln famously quoted Matthew 12:25 in a speech (called "The House Divided Speech") to the Illinois Republican Party in 1858 when he was their candidate for US Senate. In it he spoke of the issue of slavery as the division causing "the house," i.e the United States, to not be able to stand. Among the most famous lines were these seemingly prophetic words, "A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure, permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved - I do not expect the house to fall - but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing or all the other." The speech was not popular at the time, as most felt as though it provided more ammunition to his opposition, Stephen Douglas, who'd advocated for continued policies of division among free and slave states entering the Union. Indeed, Lincoln lost that election. While the speech may have cost him a place in the Senate, many of his contemporaries - at the time angry he'd given the

speech at all - came to believe it propelled him to the White House. It was the absolute wrong political statement to make in 1858, but Lincoln held to his convictions, and the political tide turned in his favor by 1860, making him president, but also leading to further division as southern states began to secede from the Union following his election.

There are certain comparisons to be made between the political environment Lincoln found himself in between 1858 and his death in 1865 and the religious environment Jesus found himself in throughout the gospels. While there's debate to be had about what Lincoln's true feelings were on slavery, he astutely recognized that it had become the political football government kept kicking down field, as they hoped to find a better, more permanent solution later on, but tensions only grew. Likewise, Jesus recognized that poverty and corruption were causing incredible strife in the lives of most Palestinians, and the Temple, which was supposed to be the solution to such problems, was only causing the problem to worsen by refusing to address the root causes. Jesus stepped in and began to take action, and those in high places did not like it at all. After failing to trap Jesus in violation of the Law of Moses, the religious elite began to get desperate and hit at Jesus with low blows. "He must be in league with the devil!" they said, because who else could cast out the devil but the devil. It was an absurd argument and Jesus picked it apart thoroughly. He made the point that action and truth come from those who truly follow God's will just as evil comes from those who seek evil. Not only are those who follow the ways of God able to do good, but they are members of the household of God, as Jesus claimed them as his own family. It wasn't a popular message, at least from the opinion of those who'd benefitted from the corruption of the Temple, but it's a message that has stood the test of time and continues to ring true today - whoever isn't with Jesus, who refused his message of justice and peace, is against him and God.

Great and faithful God, in Jesus you have called us your children, members of your own household. May we allow ourselves to be rooted deeply in your word, that we may seek unity in Christ rather than disunity in selfish ambition and personal wealth. May we be greeted by Jesus with the words, "Look, here are my mother and my brothers (and sisters)." Amen.