

Matthew 12:15-37    The Servant and the Spirit  
Isaiah 42  
Psalm 40

May 3, 2015 (Peter)

When Isaiah talks about the “Servant of the LORD,”  
who is he talking about?

In Isaiah 41:8-9, the prophet introduced the servant by saying:

“But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen,  
the offspring of Abraham, my friend;  
you whom I took from the ends of the earth,  
and called from its farthest corners,  
saying to you, ‘You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off.’”

So the “Servant” is plainly Israel:  
the offspring – the “seed” – of Abraham.

Isaiah 42 says that God will put his Spirit upon the *Servant* –  
and the Servant will bring justice to the nations –  
he will establish justice in all the earth.

I don’t blame the Jews for thinking that Isaiah was talking about Israel.  
He *was* talking about Israel.

Matthew will quote Isaiah 42 and say that this was about Jesus.  
Matthew is not saying that Isaiah 42 is not really about Israel, it’s really about Jesus.  
Rather, Matthew is saying something far simpler – and far more profound.  
Matthew is saying that Jesus *is* Israel.

It’s not that *some* of the Servant Songs are about Israel and some are about Jesus.  
All of them are about Israel –  
Israel was called to succeed where Adam failed,  
but Israel failed.  
The Law could never bring life – because that was not the purpose of the Law!  
Only God can save.  
Only God can bring life to the dead.

As Matthew has told over and over again –  
Jesus came in order to fulfill *all the Law and the Prophets*.  
Jesus came in order to fulfill *all the scriptures*.  
Everything in the whole Bible is about Jesus.

We sing about this in Psalm 40 –  
a song that *is* about David and Israel,  
and therefore is *also* about Christ and the church.  
Jesus sings Psalm 40 to us – so that we might sing it in him.

Sing Psalm 40  
Read Matthew 12:15-37

“By your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”

Jesus is talking about the final judgment.

“On the day of judgment, people will give account for every careless word.”

How will God judge on the final day?

Jesus says that on the day of judgment,

God will judge you according to your words.

By your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.

Now, I know that for many of you,

you hear that and you say, “Whoa! Wait a second!

That sounds like justification by works!”

What does Jesus mean?!

First, we need to be clear that Jesus means what he says.

Any answer that makes Jesus mean the opposite of what he says is the wrong answer.

Jesus really means that at the Judgment Day,

you will give an account for every careless word that you have spoken.

At this point, everyone is thinking, “Oh shoot, I’m in trouble!”

We’re starting at the end of our passage today,

because I want you to see why our passage today is so important!

If you just read verses 36-37, then you should be very afraid!

And maybe the ESV doesn’t help by putting verses 33-37 in a separate section.

We need to read verses 33-37 as a part of Jesus’ response to the Pharisees –

when the Pharisees said, “It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons,  
that this man casts out demons.” (v24)

Yes, you will give an account for every careless word.

But Jesus says this in the context of explaining *who* he is,  
and what *he* is doing.

If Jesus came simply to tell us, “You are going to be judged based on what you have done!”  
then it was a waste of his time.

We already knew *that* from Moses!

What Jesus tells us in this passage is *why* we no longer need to fear Judgment Day –  
*if* we repent and believe the good news.

Last time, Jesus told us about the relationship between the Father and the Son:

“No one knows the Son except the Father,  
and no one knows the Father except the Son  
and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”

As we saw last time,

Jesus claims to be *all* that Israel was supposed to be – *and then some!*

If you want to know the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,  
then you need to come to Jesus.

The ‘yoke of the law’ cannot save you.

You need to come to Jesus and take *his yoke* upon you – you need to submit to Jesus!

And that means listening and learning from Jesus how to interpret the Law and the Prophets.

That’s why Matthew includes the two stories about the Sabbath.

Jesus – the Son of Man – is Lord of the Sabbath.

Jesus is not just a prophet like Moses.

Jesus is also the Lord who spoke to Moses!

Now, in the middle of Matthew 12,

Matthew wants us to see that Jesus is the Servant of the Lord  
because he has the Spirit of God –  
just like Isaiah 42 said.

*And* you know that the Kingdom of God has come upon you  
because Jesus casts out demons by the Spirit of God.

And therefore, *everything comes down to* one question:

What kind of tree are you?

There are only two kinds of tree: good trees and bad trees.

There are those who are *with* Jesus – and there are those who are *against* Jesus.

The Pharisees are clearly *against* Jesus.

They are conspiring against him – how to destroy him.

And,

### **1. Jesus Is the Servant of the Lord Because He Has the Spirit of God (v15-21)**

<sup>15</sup> *Jesus, aware of this, 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.”*

Notice what Matthew is doing.

Matthew has been busy reporting the words and deeds of Jesus for several chapters.  
But here, in the middle of Jesus’ preaching and healing,  
Matthew stops to comment on *why* Jesus is doing what he is doing.

We heard Jesus say in the Sermon on the Mount,

“I have not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets...but to fulfill them.” (5:17)

Jesus has come to fulfill all the Law and the Prophets.

The Law and the Prophets find their true meaning and purpose in Jesus.  
Matthew wants to help us understand what this means –  
so he periodically interrupts his narrative  
to explain *how* Jesus fulfills the Law and the Prophets.

Here, Jesus tells those whom he healed “not to make him known.”

This may seem odd.

If Jesus is the Messiah, then he should want his message to get out, right?

But Matthew remembers what Isaiah had said.

The Servant of the LORD will not quarrel or cry aloud,  
nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets...

The Servant of the LORD will not be noisy and self-promoting.

Here is a prophet who remains silent –

here is a priest who be slaughtered as a sacrifice –

here is a king who will surrender to his enemies –

*until he brings justice to victory.*

We need to remember that there is a goal here.

The cross – the death of Jesus – is not the goal,  
rather, the cross is the means to the end – bringing justice to victory!

But how does Jesus bring justice to victory?

That’s why we need to understand the first part of the quote from Isaiah 42.

<sup>18</sup> *“Behold, my servant whom I have chosen,  
my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased.*

We’ve already seen that the Servant of the LORD is Israel –

and that Jesus is the Servant of the LORD

*because* he is and does all that Israel was commanded to be and do.

But here, Matthew uses the quote from Isaiah to go a step further.

Notice the next line:

Verse 18 – “my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased”

This is the same language that we heard last week in 11:26 –

“for this was “well-pleasing” to you” –

and in 3:17 – my beloved son with whom I am well-pleased”

We will hear it again at the Transfiguration.

Jesus is the beloved son – the well-pleasing son.

Why does Matthew highlight the phrase,

“my beloved son, with whom I am well-pleased”?

Because of Isaiah 42.

Isaiah spoke of the *servant* as “my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased.”

At the baptism of Jesus – and at the Transfiguration –

the Father refers to Jesus as “my beloved *Son* with whom I am well pleased.”

Matthew wants you to see that the Son of God *is* the Servant of the LORD.

And because Jesus is the Son – because Jesus is the Servant –

therefore, the Father says:

*I will put my Spirit upon him,*

*and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles.*

All of the scriptures are coming together in Jesus.

In the Exodus God called Israel, “my son, my firstborn.”

God had promised David, concerning his son,

“I will be to him a father, and he will be to me a son.”

In another context God had called Israel, “my servant.”

What Matthew is doing is bringing together all of these together

and showing how all these come together in Jesus.

Last time we saw how Matthew 11 highlighted the unique relationship  
between the Father and the Son.

Now we see that this unique relationship between the Father and the Son

is expressed by the unique way in which the Father puts the Spirit upon the Son.

At his baptism – when the Spirit descended upon Jesus –

the Father said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

Okay, so what?

What does it mean for us that the Son is the Servant of the LORD?

In Acts 13:47 – Paul and Barnabas have just been rejected by the Jews in Antioch,

and so they say:

“Since you thrust aside [the word of God] and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.

For so the LORD has commanded us, saying,

‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles,

that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’”

Here, Paul and Barnabas are also quoting from one of Isaiah’s servant songs.

Here is the whole verse (Isaiah 49:6)

“It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel;

I will make you as a light for the nations,

that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

If Jesus *is* the Servant of the LORD – if Jesus *is* all that Israel was supposed to be – then those who belong to Jesus are simply continuing his mission.

That’s why Luke sets up the book of Acts

as the things that Jesus continued to do and to teach through his apostles.

As we saw last time,

Jesus claims that “All things have been handed over to me by my Father,

and no one knows the Son except the Father,

and no one knows the Father except the Son

and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.” (11:27)

Jesus is the unique Son of God – he has been the Son of God from all eternity.

And he is unique as the *incarnate* Son of God –

the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us.

But when the Son reveals himself – and the Father – to *anyone* –

and when the Son pours out his Spirit upon his church –

then the church joins in the mission of the Son –

the church shares in the mission of the Servant.

Indeed, the church becomes “a light for the nations,

that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

But that can only happen once Jesus has “brought justice to victory”

in his triumph over sin, death, and the devil, through his resurrection from the dead!

And that is what Matthew shows us in verses 22-32

## **2. Jesus Brings the Kingdom by casting out demons by the Spirit of God (v22-32)**

Jesus heals a demon-oppressed man who was blind and mute.

All the people were amazed – and so they asked:

“Can this be the Son of David?”

**a. The Question: “Can This Be the Son of David?” (v22-23)**

<sup>22</sup> 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?”

John the Baptist had asked, “Are you the one who is to come?”

Jesus had responded by showing that  
the Law and the Prophets prophesied until John –  
and that John was the Elijah who signaled the coming of the Day of the Lord.

Now the people are amazed by Jesus  
and they start to voice the question that would naturally arise:

“Can this be the Son of David?”

Can this be the Messiah (the anointed one)?

Jesus has been telling people not to make him known.

But still, the rumors spread.

The Pharisees hear the rumors – and they seek to quash them fast:

**b. The Objection: “It Is Only by Beelzebul” (v24)**

<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.”

The Pharisees claim that it is all a trick.

They say that Jesus is using demonic power to cast out demons –  
it’s all a ruse to deceive people!

**c. The Answer: the Coming of the Spirit Is the Coming of the Kingdom (v25-32)**

**Part 1: “No House Divided Against Itself Will Stand” (v25-28)**

<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.

In verses 25-27, Jesus exposes the foolishness of their argument.

If Satan casts out Satan, then he is destroying his own kingdom.

Further, there were Pharisees who would cast out demons as well.

If casting out demons is something that only Satan does –  
then what are you saying about your own sons?!

Verse 28 gets to the heart of Jesus’ point:

<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.

Some have thought that casting out demons is a *sign* of the coming of the kingdom.

But Jesus says it more strongly than that.

Casting out demons by the Spirit of God *means* that the kingdom of God has overtaken you.

### **Part 2: Jesus Is Binding the Strong Man (v29-30)**

<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.*

In casting out demons by the Spirit of God,

Jesus is demonstrating that the kingdom has come –  
and in his death, Jesus will bind Satan himself,  
so that he can plunder his house.

Jesus is engaged in hand-to-hand combat with the devil.

Just as in the days of Moses, when God defeated Pharaoh and his armies.

Just as in the days of Samuel, when God went alone into the Philistine temple of Dagon  
and cast him down.

So now, Jesus will bind the strong man and plunder his house.

In other words, not only is Jesus the fulfillment of all that *Israel* failed to do and to be –  
Jesus is *also* the one who does and is what *only Israel's God* could do and be.

That's why Jesus says:

<sup>30</sup> *Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.*

You are either with Jesus or you are against Jesus.

(Of course, in Mark 9:38-41, Jesus will make the opposite point:

“whoever is not against us is for us.”

What is the difference?

In Mark 9, the disciples complain that someone is casting out demons in Jesus' name  
but they are not “with us.”

Jesus' response makes clear that what matters is that they are doing this in *his* name.

In other words, Jesus says to us –

“Who cares whether they follow you.

What matters is that they follow me.”)

And yet, Jesus says,

what *really* matters is how you speak of the Holy Spirit.

### **Part 3: So Do Not Blaspheme the Spirit (v31-32)**

<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.*

Why does Jesus say that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven?



As Stanley Hauerwas puts it,

“To blaspheme against the Holy Spirit is a sin that cannot be forgiven  
because forgiveness does not simply mean  
that our sins are not held against us.

Rather, forgiveness names an alternative community to the rule of Satan...

To be forgiven is to be gathered to Jesus.

Not to be forgiven is to be scattered and lost in a world of the lost.

Blasphemy is the denial, the refusal, to participate in the new world  
begun by the repentance made possible

by the power bestowed by the Spirit on this man, Jesus.” (p122)

A person can speak against Jesus because they do not understand who he is.

*That* can be forgiven.

But if you *know* who the Holy Spirit is and what the Holy Spirit is doing –  
and yet you speak against the Holy Spirit –

then you are saying that you prefer the Kingdom of Satan  
to the Kingdom of God.

If you want an example, think of Saul of Tarsus – later known as the apostle Paul.

Saul of Tarsus spoke against Jesus –

he said that Jesus was not the Messiah –

and persecuted those who followed Jesus.

As Paul says to Timothy, “formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent.

But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief,..” (1 Tim 1:13)

If you hear about Jesus and blaspheme, you are guilty of slandering God –

but your ignorance and unbelief can be forgiven:

all you need to do is repent!

Saul of Tarsus *did* repent – and thus became Paul the apostle.

But Jesus says that if you blaspheme the Spirit – in other words,

if you consciously, willfully, and permanently reject the gospel –

you will not be forgiven,

either in this age, or in the age to come.

And this is where you need to see that verse 33 follows verse 32.

It is a new paragraph –

but it’s part of the same response.

The Pharisees have accused Jesus of casting out demons by the prince of demons.

Jesus has said that the Kingdom of God has come –

*because* he is casting out demons by the Spirit of God.

And *still addressing the Pharisees*, Jesus says:

### 3. Your Tongue Reveals Your Heart (v33-37)

<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.”

Why do the Pharisees bring forth evil words?

Because their hearts are evil.

Now, let's be perfectly clear:

what kind of words are we talking about?

Is Jesus saying that only Christians ever say good things?

Non-Christians *always* say evil things?

No.

What words are we talking about?

“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....

You brood of vipers!

How can you speak good, when you are evil?”

Sure, there's a verse in between –

but verse 33 does not introduce a new topic.

You, Pharisees, are a brood of vipers (the same language John had used).

And out of the abundance of your heart your mouth speaks.

Jesus is not making generalizations about “Christians” and “non-Christians.”

He is addressing those who are hostile to his ministry

and he is saying,

“You can be forgiven for opposing me.

But you need to become a good tree in order to bear good fruit.

You must be born again.”

Your words reveal your heart.

*Your words about Jesus –*

and especially, your words about the Holy Spirit.

“For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.”

What is in your heart is *going* to come out.

Now perhaps we are ready to understand what Jesus means when he says,  
“by your words you will be justified,  
and by your words you will be condemned.”

Jesus is not talking about the *doctrine of justification*.

Jesus is talking about the final judgment.

At the day of judgment, yes,

you will have to give an account for all your careless words.

*Careless words* – like “it is only by Beelzebul that this man casts out demons.”

Jesus is not talking about “petty stuff” here.

Jesus is not talking about a divine record of every phrase you’ve ever spoken:

“Well, on May 13, 1993, Joe said something a little frivolous...”

No!

Jesus is talking to people who have accused him of being in league with the devil.

And he says to them, “by your words you will be justified,

and by your words you will be condemned.”

*Have you accused Jesus of being in league with the devil?*

No?

Good!

But then, let’s put it more positively:

how *have* you spoken about Jesus?

Have you confessed him before men?

Have you repented of your sin, and asked for forgiveness from God and man?

You see, Jesus knows our hearts!

When you have sinned, your heart can still bring forth *good things* –

because the one who belongs to Jesus will repent of his sin!

When you have denied Christ by your words and deeds,

like Peter did,

you are not doomed!

Why not?

Because Jesus is the Servant of the LORD –

“my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased.”

The Father has put his Spirit upon Jesus –

so that Jesus might proclaim justice to the Gentiles.

You are not doomed because the Kingdom of God has come –

as Jesus casts out demons by the Spirit of God.

Indeed, Jesus has bound the strong man in his death –  
so that Jesus might plunder the strong man,  
rescuing us from the clutches of the devil!

And when you stand at the Judgment Seat of Christ,  
and you give account for every word that you have spoken,  
what words will be on display?

Remember what Jesus said:

“every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people,  
but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.”

That means that the only words that will be held against you on the Day of Judgment  
are words that attribute the work of the Spirit to the Devil –  
words that entail the final, total, and permanent rejection of Christ.

When Jesus calls you, he changes your heart – he “makes the tree good.”  
It doesn’t mean that you never say anything bad again.  
It means that you confess Jesus as Lord.  
And it means that you confess your sins to God – and to others.  
After all, you’re not trying to establish *your kingdom* –  
you are thankful to be part of *Jesus’ kingdom*!