

Matthew 12:22-37 “Watch What You Say!”

Intro. I am quite confident that there is not one person here today who has not said something that they regretted saying. Sometimes we gossip. Sometimes we may tell a lie. Sometimes we say something really dumb. Sometimes we may say something very hurtful. Some professing Christians even let out profanity from time to time. Have you noticed that even children can be very cruel with their words? Why do we have such a problem saying the right thing, and avoiding saying the wrong thing? Our text today has some answers.

First, let me give you the background of our text. A man was brought to Jesus who was certainly in a sad state, for he was blind *and* unable to speak. Imagine not being able to see *or* speak! And the reason he could do neither was because he was possessed by a demonic spirit. Friend, the devil is a thief, and he robbed this man of his ability to see and speak. But then, without fanfare or a long process of incantations, v.22 simply says of Jesus, “He healed him, so that the blind and mute man both spoke and saw.”

Now the crowd reacted with amazement. That word literally means “to stand outside of yourself.” They were out of their mind with amazement. As a result, they considered the possibility that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah. This prompted the religious leaders to spew out slander against Jesus and they said something really dumb. They said in v.24, “This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons.” They could not deny the miracle so they attributed the miracle to Satan! Yet that would mean that Satan was working against his own kingdom. What a foolish statement! So after Jesus rebuked and corrected them, they should have been a bit red-faced. They should have wished they had kept their mouths shut. And that was the occasion of an important teaching on the problem of the wrong use of our tongues. And Jesus gives both the underlying cause of the problem, as well as the cure of the problem. I hope you are interested.

Now before we will seek a cure, we must first understand what the problem is. So let’s:

I. CONSIDER THE SPIRITUAL PROBLEMS PEOPLE FACE

As I have studied this text, I can identify at least 4 spiritual problems that people face. Many people have:

A. Doubts and Unbelief Regarding Christ – Let’s start with the people’s failure to express faith. Actually, the response of the people in v.23 was a bit different than what was given in the New King James. The original Greek¹ could be translated, “This isn’t the Son of David, is He?” The people were compelled by the mighty miracles of Jesus to consider the *possibility* that He was the promised Messiah, but their question expected a negative answer. Actually, I believe in their hearts they knew that Jesus must be the Messiah, but they phrased their question the way they did out of fear of their religious leaders. To openly confess Jesus as the Messiah was to invite a hostile reaction from many of the religious leaders (John 9:22; 12:42).

¹ Μήτι οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱὸς Δαυίδ. Μήτι expects a negative answer.

Now the very suggestion of the possibility that Jesus might be the long awaited One was poison to the Scribes and Pharisees. They were envious of Jesus and concerned that they were losing their following. So their religious leaders spoke up and gave the people what they thought was the definitive explanation. They denied that God had anything to do with this miracle. Instead, they went so far in their unbelief to say in v.24, “This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub,² the ruler of the demons.” They said, “This proves nothing. Just because he cast out demons does not mean He is from God. Satan can cast out demons.” This was the second time they had said such a dreadful thing (10:25). But now they were becoming bolder, more contemptuous, and more hardened in their unbelief. They were even accusing Jesus of engaging in occultic activity.

What do you believe about Jesus? Do you believe He is the Son of God? Do you believe He is the Savior that God promised to send? Or do you have doubts? Do you believe the modern-day critics of Jesus, who say that the biblical portrayal of Jesus was just a myth, a creation of the Church? Or do you believe that Jesus was at best just a great man? If so, I want to warn you that unbelief about Jesus is a serious problem.

One reason is this: unbelief will lead to another problem:

B. Inappropriate Speech –There are many kinds of inappropriate speech. Our text addresses two examples:

1. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit – To blaspheme is to slander, defame, or malign someone. The Pharisees had already done so to Jesus. They did not address Him directly, but they slandered Him behind His back. They said in v.24, “This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons.” Then Jesus warned the Pharisees that they were treading on very dangerous ground. Well, Jesus may not have heard them but v.25 says He knew their thoughts. So He says in v.31, “Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men.” He restates the same point in stronger language in v.32.

So what does it mean to blaspheme the Holy Spirit? Based on the context, it is to attribute the works of the Holy Spirit to the devil. That’s what they did in v.24. But Jesus strongly affirmed that the Spirit of God was at work in His miracles, to bear witness that Jesus is the Messiah. So they attributed the gracious works of God’s Holy Spirit to the power of Satan. Moreover, they are doing this willfully, deliberately, in spite of all the evidences to the contrary, as Jesus is about to make clear.

You know, sometimes we can say some really dumb things! The Pharisees certainly made a dumb accusation. First of all, their accusation didn’t even make sense. Jesus said in vv.25-26, “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?” Here Jesus affirms that Satan is real, and he has an organized kingdom of evil in the unseen world. There will certainly be a great conflict between the kingdom of Satan and the Kingdom of God. But it is unconceivable that Satan would be so dumb as to fight against his own kingdom, and lose control over one of his subjects. That would mean that his kingdom was in a state of civil war. A kingdom divided against itself cannot stand. That’s true of a nation or a church. You can be sure that Satan’s kingdom is united and not torn into warring factions. He won’t allow it.

² Some Gk. texts read “Beelzebub” or “Beelzeboul,” a Philistine deity.

Furthermore, their charge was inconsistent. In v.27 Jesus said, “And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges.” The Pharisees’ disciples practiced exorcism.³ But if the Pharisees were right in doing this, how could they with any kind of consistency oppose Jesus for engaging in the same type of work? Otherwise, they would be condemning themselves.

Then we see in v.32 that they made a dangerous accusation. So Jesus gives a strong warning regarding this sin. He says, “...whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.” They did not know it, but this time they had crossed the mysterious boundary line between God’s mercy and His wrath. We see here that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit betrays a state of soul beyond hope of redemption. The people who saw so many mighty miracles, signs, and wonders in the presence of incarnate goodness and grace, and attributed it all to devil, could only be abandoned by God. The Pharisees’ blasphemous lie sealed the eternal doom of those who spoke it. Their sin is unpardonable because they are hardened in unbelief, *unwilling* to tread the path that leads to pardon.

Is there an “unpardonable sin” today? Yes, the final rejection of the Spirit’s conviction of our sin (John 16:7-11), and His witness regarding Jesus Christ (John 15:26) is unpardonable. So you better watch out regarding how you respond to the work of the Holy Spirit. Has He been convicting you of sin? Has He been seeking to bring you to the place of placing your faith in Christ? If so, you had better respond before it’s too late.

There is another type of inappropriate language mentioned in our text:

2. Idle Words – Every articulate person uses at least 7,000 words a day. And so in v.36 Jesus warned, “But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment.” That word translated “idle” (*argos*) here it refers to unproductive, unfruitful, useless words. It refers to things that are said that have no benefit to the listener. Sometimes we talk even when we don’t have anything good to say. Well in light of this verse, I would advise you in such cases to just keep your mouth shut! That’s what the enemies of Jesus should have done. James 1:19 says we should be “swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.” Prov. 21:23 says, “Whoever guards his mouth and tongue keeps his soul from troubles.” Your mama may have taught you, “If you don’t have something good to say, don’t say it at all.”

I have to apply this to social media. People will say to someone on social media what they would not say if they were speaking directly to them face-to-face. So be careful what you say on social media. If you feel you must speak regarding an issue, perhaps write it down in a separate document, think on it for a day or so. Put it to the test of v.36. Will it be beneficial or just idle words? Post your comments only if they pass the test of being something beneficial.

But do you know what the underlying cause of such inappropriate speech? Jesus tells us in this context. This leads to the third spiritual problem that we will consider today:

C. Our Sin Nature – We see here that we have a problem with our tongues because we have a problem with our hearts. What we do or say is determined by who we are on the inside. For example, in v.34 Jesus diagnoses the real problem with His adversaries. Remember, they had just slandered Him, as well as the Holy Spirit. So He said, “Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.” Then in the last of v.35 He explained, “...an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things.”

³ That occasionally such successful conjuration of evil spirits by the “sons” or disciples of the Pharisees may actually have occurred need not be disputed (7:22).

Someone said, “What is in the well of the heart will come out through the bucket of the mouth.” Even so, by their words these Pharisees displayed to everyone that they were rotten to the core.

Several years ago a story in a national magazine described a couple who “adopted” two wolves. They discovered the two wolves, still young and small, while making a movie about caribou in Alaska. They took the wolves to their home, raised them, and gave them the kindest treatment. For a while, the wolves behaved just like friendly dogs. Finally, however, the wolves turned on their masters, who barely escaped with their lives, and then the wolves fled to join a wild wolf pack. No matter how kind their treatment, the nature of the wolves was such that sooner or later they were bound to behave like other wolves. The wolf nature could not be trained or nurtured out of them.

That is a good analogy of our sinful nature. In v.33 Jesus says that a bad tree will produce bad fruit. Sickly fruit proves that something is wrong with the tree. The sickly fruit of the Pharisees was blasphemous speech (v.24). You can tell much about the heart of a man from his speech. It is by our conversation, especially *at unguarded moments*, that we reveal our true character.

What about your speech? Does it reveal that you are still dominated by a sin nature? If so, I give you hope today. God has an answer to your problem, and I will get to that in just a moment. But first, because of all the problems I have talked about so far, people face another big problem:

D. God’s Judgment – Jesus says in v.36, “But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment.” Friend, Jesus is warning that there is a Day of Judgment coming. It seems that most people are ignoring that solemn truth. Your life is going to come under review of God, whose eyes are like eyes of fire. He knows everything you have ever said or done. And Jesus says that you will “give account” of “every idle word.” The word translated “give account” (*apodidomi*) usually means to pay a debt. In other words, we will be held accountable for every idle word we speak. When a person is arrested, he is warned that anything he says will be used against him. Similarly, the Lord warns us that our words will be used against us, for in v.37 Jesus mentions the possibility of being condemned by our words. For some who are hearing me today, there will be payday someday at the Day of Judgment.

Nothing ought to trouble us more than the fact that our every word is recorded in heaven! That gossip you repeated was recorded. That lie was recorded. That profanity was recorded. So what you say, even behind closed doors, will be used against you at the Day of Judgment! If you are not a Christian, your words will be used as evidence against you as to why you deserve the eternal judgment of God.

What will you do about the Lord’s warning regarding the Day of Judgment? In August of 2005 one of the worst natural disasters hit our gulf coast. New Orleans, which is mostly under sea level, was in the path of a category 5 hurricane. The people were warned of the danger and told to evacuate. Some just didn’t have the means to get out. But others simply ignored the warning and suffered or even died as a result.

Will you be like many of the people of New Orleans, and simply ignore the warnings of judgment? Will you seek an answer for the problems that we all face? Or will you stick your head in the sand, and just hope that these problems will go away? Well, in light of these problems, let me encourage you to:

II. ACCEPT GOD'S ANSWER!

We have considered the spiritual problems that people face. Now let me show you the step-by-step answer that Jesus gives in this text of Scripture. First, instead of having doubts and unbelief about Jesus:

A. Place Your Faith in Jesus – He is God's answer to the deepest problems you face. He is the Savior that God promised to send. How do I know that? We have plenty of evidence right here in our text.

1. Because of the Miracles He Performed – In v.22 Jesus performed a great miracle. There Matthew reports, “Then one was brought to Him who was demon-possessed, blind and mute; and He healed him, so that the blind and mute man both spoke and saw.” Jesus affirmed that such a miracle was wrought by the power of the Spirit of God to demonstrate that the long-promised King of Israel, the Messiah, had come. He said in v.28, “But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely [or “therefore”-*ara*] the kingdom of God has come upon you.” Jesus indicates that casting out demons is indeed a sign that He is ushering in the Messianic kingdom. Healing the blind was another significant Messianic sign (Isa. 35:5; 42:7). I believe the evidence is overwhelming that Jesus performed many great miracles. Surely, He is the Savior God promised.

2. Because the Power of Satan Has Been Curtailed – It is clear from the Gospel accounts that demon possession was pretty common in Palestine during the days of Christ. For example, Mt. 8:16 says, “When evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed. And He cast out the spirits with a word...” But since Christ came, demon possession is much less common, especially in societies that have been influenced by the Gospel. The reason for the change is found in v.29, “Or how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house.” To steal from a man's own house, the robber must first disarm and tie up the homeowner. Then he can take what he wants. Satan is the strong man in this story. His demons took over the lives of many victims. In order to set them free from his control, Satan first had to be bound by One who is stronger, the Lord Jesus Christ! Indeed, this demon possessed man in chapter 12 was only set free by One stronger than Satan or the demon!

What is happening today is that in many cases, souls are being saved and set free from the kingdom of Satan and placed into the kingdom of God. Jesus won the victory over Satan, especially by His death on the cross (Col. 2:15), and by His resurrection and ascension to the throne in heaven (Rev. 12:5, 9-12). God's kingdom has been expanding over the realm of Satan through a mighty missionary program.⁴ Christ has demonstrated His victory over Satan many times.

Let me give you another reason why you should believe in Jesus:

3. Because You Know Jesus by the Fruit of His Life – Jesus says in v.33, “a tree is known by its fruit.” He challenged the Pharisees to be honest and judge Him by His works (Jn. __:__). Were they or were they not good works? If so, let His enemies acknowledge the tree because of its fruit. To say that while the deeds of Jesus, such as demon-expulsion, healing the sick, etc., may be beneficial, yet He Himself is bad makes no sense. Who Jesus is must be determined by what He does: a tree is judged by its fruit. Therefore, Jesus' works proved Him to

⁴ Note how also in Luke 10:17, 18 the “fall of Satan as lightning from heaven” is recorded in connection with the return and report of the seventy missionaries.

be good; their words, so full of deadly poison, proved *them* to be bad, of their father the devil. Also, note the fruit of the Christian movement. Everywhere the gospel of Christ has been embraced, good works have followed. Nations that have embraced Christianity the most have enjoyed the most freedom, equal justice and prosperity.

So the evidence is overwhelming. Jesus is Someone you can believe in. You can trust Him with your life. John 3:16 says that God gave His Son, that whoever believes in Him would not perish, but have everlasting life. Will you believe in Him today?

Now in order to believe in Jesus, you must:

B. Don't Be Neutral about Jesus – You can't be, but we have seen that the crowd tried to be neutral about Jesus, even after He performed this great miracle. So Jesus said in v.30, "He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad." In the struggle between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of Satan neutrality is impossible. You belong to one or to the other. God is Victor over Satan, and men must decide on whose side they will stand. There can be no compromise. We are either with God or against God.

And notice that Jesus said that you are either gathering with Him or you are scattering abroad. In other words, a true commitment to Jesus means joining Him in His work. What we have here is an agricultural analogy. Leading souls to Christ is like harvesting and gathering grain. To be "with" Jesus means to be instrumental in gathering people into the kingdom of God. Prov. 11:30 says, "...he who wins souls is wise." Dan. 12:3 says, "...those who turn many to righteousness [shall shine] like the stars forever and ever." And Jesus said in John 4:35-36, "...Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life...." To be "against" Him means to be unwilling to follow Him in His mission to gather the lost. It means to leave them as easy prey for Satan. Shall we do nothing, while Satan uses peer pressure, the media, Universities, the Internet, and drugs to capture countless numbers of our precious children and young people?

So don't imagine that you can be neutral about Jesus. If you do not trust in Him, confess Him, and join His mission to rescue others, you are against Him. Today, I'm afraid we are losing more than we are gaining.

We all sin by our deeds and our words. So I also call upon you to:

C. Receive God's Forgiveness – In v.37 Jesus said, "For by your words you will be justified...." But none of us has a chance at the judgment of God if we try to be justified by our words. We cannot get to heaven based on our works either. Your only hope is the mercy and grace of God. And Jesus holds out for us the hope of forgiveness in v.31, "Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men...." In the biblical context it is clear that such an offer of forgiveness is conditioned upon repentance and faith. But if you repent of your sin, and trust in God's Son, then every sin you have ever committed will be forgiven! For example, there was forgiveness for David's sin of adultery, dishonesty, and murder (II Sam. 12:13; Ps. 51; cf. Ps. 32). There was forgiveness for the prodigal son's "riotous living" (Luke 15:13, 21-24). There was forgiveness for Simon Peter's triple denial of Christ, accompanied by profanity (Matt. 26:74, 75; Luke 22:31, 32). And what God has done for others, He will do for you! He even says in v.32 that even a slanderous word spoken about Jesus Himself can be forgiven. There is no sin committed yesterday that the Lord would not forgive today because He died for all sin.

Back in the day when our words were recorded on cassette tape, a person could take a magnet and erase their words from the tape. Even so, we need the Lord to draw the magnet of His work at Calvary across the tape of our recorded words. We need to have our incriminating words blotted out. We need God to say, "I will remember them no more." If He doesn't destroy the evidence, we will stand condemned by our words. But there is hope of forgiveness in Jesus.

So will you believe in Jesus, and receive God's forgiveness. Christ died for your sin. That will certainly take care of the forgiveness of sin, but you must take another step to avoid repeating the same sins all over again. Here is what you must do:

D. Receive a New Heart – Jesus says in v.33, "...make the tree good and its fruit good..." Here in v.35 Jesus explains why you need a new heart, "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things." The key issue is not outward reformation but changing the inward nature of man from evil to good. V.35 is no excuse for a fatalistic view of life. Don't say, "I can't help it that I lose my tempter and cuss. I was born that way." You're right, you were born with a sin nature. But you are responsible for your actions because you *can* receive a new nature! The Lord is ever willing and eager to give whatever He demands of men. This is why Jesus said in John 3:5, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." You can't change yourself, but God can change you. It is the work of the Spirit of God to regenerate you. So 2 Cor. 5:17 says, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." Friend, it's a miracle what God can do. He can replace that old, sinful heart with a new heart. And that new nature produces new desires, and you will have a new ability to obey God.

The history of the Christian church is full of examples of the power of God to change lives. Some of you remember seeing the movie, "End of the Spear." If you didn't, be sure to watch it on video. Back in 1954, Christian missionaries Jim Elliot, Steve Saint, and 3 others went to the Amazon River to seek out one of the most violent tribes ever known. Sometime after they made contact with them, they were speared to death. But soon afterwards, the wife of one of the slain men, and the sister of another, went to live with the tribe who killed their loved ones. They eventually reached the tribe with the Gospel and the power of forgiveness. As many in the tribe gave their hearts to Christ, they renounced their violent ways. In fact, within two years, the tribal homicide rate dropped more than 90 percent. The whole tribe was transformed by the power of the Gospel!

So try the power of the Gospel for yourselves. You cannot make the tree good, but you can let Jesus Christ do it.

So dear friend, have you been born again? Let me tell you how you can know. Jesus said in v.37, "For by your words you will be justified..." He's is not saying that we are saved by avoiding useless and blasphemous speech, and only speaking what is good and useful. He is applying what He has already said in v.33, "a tree is known by its fruit." One way we know we are saved is by the fruit of our lips. Have your lips professed Christ as Lord and Savior? If not, how can you say you are a Christian? Do your lips habitually utter corrupt or useless speech? If so, how can you say you are a Christian? Do you speak the truth, or lies? To be sure, a man is saved by grace alone, through faith, apart from any works. Nevertheless, his works—this includes his words—supply the needed evidence showing whether or not he was and is a child of God.

Conclusion: So stop trying to be neutral about Jesus. Place your faith in Him. You can be forgiven through His sacrificial death on the Cross. He can change your heart. You can be a brand-new person. What God has done for others, He'll do for you. And if you are truly saved today, I believe you will use your mouth to confess Christ as your Savior. Do it today!

Sources: Stephen Felker, *Devotional & Explanatory Notes on the Entire Bible* (Col. Hghts, VA: Published by Author), 2020; William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol 6 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); John Philips, *Exploring The Gospel of Matthew: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1999); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:30] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Loyal: Matthew* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1980); Michael J. Wilkins, *The NIV Application Commentary: Matthew* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

ABOUT THESE SERMON NOTES

© Dr. Stephen Felker. These notes may be used and even shared for personal study or ministry, but not for commercial purposes. The author credits the sources listed above and footnotes for much of the content. The “live” recording of this sermon will be more completely in the author’s own words. To obtain an audio or video recording of this message, go to www.sermonaudio.com/pastorFelker, or go to www.SwiftCreekBaptistChurch.com/Resources. Dr. Felker’s email address is S+Felker&2@aol.com (remove signs).