

XIII. CHAPTER 12

A. Chapter Introduction

1. This chapter begins the earnest resistance to Jesus' authority. Ultimately it is the resistance to God's authority.
2. The malice of the Pharisees centered on their disagreement with the Lord over the Sabbath. Indeed it was the Sabbath question that brought the Jewish authorities to their decision to get rid of Jesus.
3. The Sabbath and circumcision were the most important and sacred of institutions; they made a Jew a Jew. The Sabbath particularly was distinctive of Judaism. No other people set apart one day in seven for worship of God, enjoyment of rest, and cultivation of the spiritual side of life. The rabbis hedged the Sabbath around with a thousand restrictions.
4. Sabbath Days Journey : a distance of 2000 cubits (2999.99 feet) that under rabbinic law a Jew might travel on the Sabbath from the walled limits of a town or city.

B. Vs. 1-20 Lord of the Sabbath

1. Vs. 1-8 In the Field

a. V.1 The Incident

- (1) The travel through the grainfields had to have been limited to the Sabbath Days Journey.
- (2) The disciples plucking the grain was within the requirements of the Law (Deuteronomy 23:25).

b. V.2 The Accusation

- (1) The accusation here is false as the law provided for the actions of the disciples.

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- (2) The problem was not that they were breaking the sabbath, but that they were breaking the Sabbath rules of the rabbis. The rabbis elevated their tradition above God's Word.
- (3) The argument of illegal activity is invalid and portends the path these men are willing to take to reject God.

c. Vs. 3-5 The Defense

- (1) Jesus counters with the argument that such activity is not illegal.
- (2) V.3 ***“have you not read”*** Is a direct reference to scriptures.
 - (a) On six different times Jesus will use this phrase and refers to six different books of the Old Testament with seven passages:
 - i) Matthew 12:3 (Leviticus 24:6-9, 1 Samuel 21:6)
 - ii) Matthew 12:5 (Numbers 28:9-10)
 - iii) Matthew 19:4 (Genesis 1:27)
 - iv) Matthew 21:16 (Psalm 8:2)
 - v) Matthew 21:42 (Psalm 118:22)
 - vi) Matthew 22:31-32 (Exodus 3:6).
 - (b) *“This is a significant illustration of our lord’s attitude toward the Word of God. He believed it, quoted it as authoritative, appealed to it without hesitation, knew it perfectly, and put His divine imprimatur on it in all parts. Those who detract from the Word of God are strangers to Christ.”*(John Phillips, ***Exploring the Gospel of Matthew, An Expository Commentary, The John Phillips Commentary***)

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Series, Kregel Publications, 1999, p.226).

- (c) The Pharisees in their religious conceit quote the scriptures to show their superiority. It is an arrogant display of supposed superiority.
- (3) V. 4 Jesus sites the incident with David where the priest gave David the show bread (I Samuel 21:1-6).
- (a) *“David and his followers were in flight from King Saul. They were hungry so they appealed to the high priest for bread. The only bread available was the sacred shewbread, which was placed on the table in the holy place of the tabernacle once a week. The bread was to be eaten by the priests and their dependents exclusively. However, the high priest (with a certain amount of hesitation) gave the twelve loaves to David and his men, and God’s wrath did not descend. That took care of the Pharisees objection to the disciples’ eating what tradition said was unlawful food. David’s need was more important than ritual...If God could thus set aside His ceremonial law, how much more could the Lord set aside rabbinic traditional law, which had no authority.”* (John Phillips, *Exploring the Gospel of Matthew, An Expository Commentary, The John Phillips Commentary Series*, Kregel Publications, 1999, p.226).
 - (b) The important point here is that though the Pharisees claimed have superior knowledge of the scriptures over that of this lowly carpenter; they really did not understand the very scriptures that they were quoting.
- (4) V.5
- (a) *“have you not read”* Is a direct reference to

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scriptures for the second time.

- (b) Here the Lord reminds these critics that the priest in the temple work on the Sabbath day, but are blameless in profaning it.
- (c) The priest had to prepare the a Sabbath offerings (Numbers28:9-10). His preparation work included:
 - i) The animals had to be inspected to make sure there was no blemish.
 - ii) Then the animal had to be slaughtered following a specific ceremony.
 - iii) The wood had to be brought in and properly arranged on the altar.
 - iv) The animals had to be flayed and lifted onto the altar.
- (d) This was only part of the priests work on the Sabbath. Evidently the Mosaic law for the Sabbath did not forbid all work, only work for gain.

d. Vs. 6-8

(1) V.6

- (a) The Jews have an almost idolatrous veneration for the temple.
 - i) They stoned Stephen for what they considered an attack on it (Acts 7:47-51).

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- ii) History tells us that they fought with the utmost fanaticism to protect the temple during the war with Rome in 70 A.D.

- (b) The scriptures tell us that God sent His cloud of glory to signify His presence with his people. First into the tabernacle (Exodus 40:34-38), then into Solomon's Temple (1 Kings 8:10-11). It left the temple with the start of the captivity (Ezekiel 10:4, 18-19, 11:23). God's presence is not seen in the temple until the return of the Messiah in the new temple (Ezekiel 43-44).

- (c) ***"..in this place there is One greater than the temple."*** Jesus is telling these Jewish leaders that the temple which they worship is not inhabited by God as they claim, but in reference to Himself he tells them that God is where He is, not in their temple.

- (d) To hear Jesus claim to be greater than the temple left them speechless.

- (2) V.7
 - (a) The temple of Jesus' day was a place of endless ritual sacrifices. Jesus sweeps all that ritual aside as invalid and He does so by quoting God's Word found in the Book of Hosea (Hosea 6:6).

 - (b) If they had truly understood who and what God is they would never have developed the system of man made ritual and law which they now worship.

 - (c) The rabbis had made the Sabbath a burden instead of a blessing.

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- (d) Phillips writes: *“They had heartlessly heaped on the longsuffering people, who were almost wholly dependent on them for Biblical teaching, a thousand requirements over and above the law. Content with the outward form- whether it had to do with the sabbath, the sanctuary, or the sacrifices- the rabbis had conveyed false ideas about God. Their God was meticulous, a stickler for details. But the true God- the One who instituted the sabbath, provided the sacrificial system, and once abode in their sanctuary- was merciful. The rabbis, and Pharisees had missed the point and that was why they criticized the disciples, who were guiltless.”* (John Phillips, **Exploring the Gospel of Matthew, An Expository Commentary, The John Phillips Commentary Series**, Kregel Publications, 1999, p.228).

(3) V.8

- (a) As if His claim to be greater than the temple were not enough fuel for the fire Jesus now adds another: He was greater than the Sabbath.
- (b) ***“..the Son of Man..”***
- i) Notice here that Jesus does not claim to be Lord of the Sabbath as the Son of God.
- ii) It is the Lord’s Messianic title. It has everything to do with his being human (Psalm 8:4-6).
- iii) It is a title which reflects the authority and power granted to him as the perfect man over all creation including the

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Sabbath.

- (c) Philips observes: “*In the Old Testament the Jews found their sabbath rest in a day, the seventh day of the week in commemoration of God’s creation rest (Genesis 2:1-3; Exodus 20:8-11). God’s sabbath rest, however, had been broken by sin. The Jewish sabbath was only a picture; it anticipated a rest based on the finished work of Christ (John 17:4; 19:30). So in the new covenant, our rest, like that of God, is in a person: Jesus, the Lord of the sabbath.*” (John Phillips, *Exploring the Gospel of Matthew, An Expository Commentary, The John Phillips Commentary Series*, Kregel Publications, 1999, p.228).

2. Vs. 9-20 In the Temple

- a. V.9 Now things move from the field to into the temple. No longer is Jesus on his own ground, but He moves onto the ground claimed by the religious leaders.
- (1) Notice that the temple is not called God’s synagogue, but **their** synagogue.
 - (2) We are moving into enemy territory.
 - (3) It is here that a spirit of criticism and hate rules.
 - (a) Many churches have gone down this path of criticism and hate all in the name of religion.
 - (b) Sadly at times some of these churches do so in the name of the gospel, but do not know what the gospel is or means.

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b. V.10

- (1) You have to ask the question here “What is a man who has a withered hand doing in the synagogue?”
- (2) Under the Law a person with a defect could not or should not have been there (Leviticus 21:17-23; Deuteronomy 23:1).
 - (a) This has lead some commentators to concluded that this man was a plant by the Pharisees to trap Jesus.
 - (b) Although the scriptures do not say so, there may be some validity to the plant theory. Luke tells us that they watched Jesus closely to see what he would do about he man (Luke 6:7).
 - i) Luke also tells us that it was a definite trap.

c. Vs.11-12

- (1) Jesus tells them that they will break the sabbath work restriction to help an animal. All in the name of doing good.
- (2) *“In effect the Lord had said to them, ‘You care for that sheep because it is yours and you set a high value on it.’ The King was now claiming to own the afflicted man as well as the sabbath! That man was His sheep. The poor man with the useless, unsightly hand was of great worth in the sight of the Savior; he was infinitely mor valuable than a sheep.”* (John Phillips, ***Exploring the Gospel of Matthew, An Expository Commentary, The John Phillips Commentary Series***, Kregel Publications, 1999, p.229).

d. V.13

- (1) Jesus heals the man, but he does it in such a way that you would never know the hand had been withered.
- (2) This is a clear demonstration of his deity as creator. Remember the creator is the one who sets the rules. This is something the religious leaders would not like.

e. V.14

- (1) Instead of glorifying God for the healing of this poor man, they instead plot the murder of the healer.
- (2) Mark 3:6 tells us that they went so far in their plotting as to involve the Herodians. The Herodians were adherents of Herod Antipas. The Pharisees hated everything about the Herodians, but they hated Jesus even more.

f. V.15

- (1) ***“..He withdrew from there.”*** This is the first time we see Jesus withdrawing in order to escape his enemies. Jesus knew that this was a place of great danger. Not only for himself, but for his followers.
 - (a) The religious leaders wanted him dead. They would have killed his followers as well as him.
 - (b) The crowd wanted the quick fix to their problems and there was a real danger of being crushed to death (Mark 3:9).
 - (c) It was not His time to die. Nor would the manner of death be one that would remove sin from man. The very purpose He came into the

world.

- (2) **“..great multitudes followed Him..”**
 - (a) Mark tells us that multitudes followed Him. They came from every corner of the nations of the Jews and beyond (Mark 3: 7-8).
 - (b) Luke likewise verifies what Mark states (Luke 6:17).
- (3) **“..He healed them all.”** This is important to note. Both Matthew and Luke point out that he healed them all (Luke 6:19). Not some or many ALL.

g. V.16

- (1) Jesus charges those healed not to spread abroad the report of his power. He had not come to create astonishment in the minds of men by his wonder working ability.
- (2) He had come to manifest the meek and lowliness that the prophet Isaiah said the Messiah would do when he came.

h. Vs.17-21

- (1) V. 17 Matthew points out here that the Prophet Isaiah had said that the things Jesus was now doing the Messiah would do (Isaiah 42:1-4).
- (2) The passages from Isaiah are those which refer to the first coming of the Messiah. Something that the Jews in general and especially the religious leaders had missed - two comings of the Messiah not one.
 - (a) The final reason he withdrew is found in verse

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20- ***“Till He sends forth justice to victory.”***

- i) Justice and victory are second coming things.
- ii) At this time Jesus could not bring justice on these men because it was not the time to do so. An age of mercy had to come about.

(3) V.18

- (a) ***“And He will declare justice to the Gentiles.”***
Jesus will define what justice is. It will be God’s standard of justice not man’s.

(4) V.19

- (a) This is actually a statement of finality. God will tell man what justice is and there will be no argument about it.
- (b) The verse speaks to the fact that God is the final authority for justice not man.
 - i) At least three times in the Old Testament scriptures God has made this point (Leviticus 19:18; 1 Samuel 24:12-13; Deuteronomy 32:35)
 - ii) Twice in the New Testament the believers in the church are told the same thing. It is God who will provide the standard of justice and execute it not man (Romans 12:19; Hebrews 10:30).

(5) V.20

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- (a) The Isaiah quote is generally understood as teaching that the Messiah would be meek and mild. He would not break the weak faith of a man or put out the smoking flax faith of a man but that he will help such men who find themselves in that condition.
- (b) The Isaiah quote actually do not teach this it is really teaching that the Messiah will restrain judgement and show mercy to those whose faith is weak.
 - i) This is the reason that Jesus quotes Hosea 6:6 in the previous verse 7.
 - ii) This act of grace is also one of the reasons that He withdrew from the area of the Pharisees
 - a) (see V.15).
 - b) If he had not withdrawn he would have destroyed them.

(6) V. 21 The Trust of the Gentiles

C. Vs. 22-23

1. V.22

- a. This man was incapacitated by this affliction by the demon. It was beyond the ability of any human to fix his problems.

2. V.23

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- a. The reaction of the common people is exactly what you would expect. They recognized that the cure was beyond human abilities and the only one who was supposed to possess this kind of power was the Messiah.
 - b. They saw the miracle healing as proof that Jesus was the long sought Messiah.
- D. Vs. 24-30
1. V.24
 - a. **“Beelzebub”** is literally “Lord of the Flies.”
 - (1) God of the Ekronites (2Kings 1:2). Ekron was a Philistine city in southwestern Judah somewhere near Gaza and Gath.
 - (2) The name of this god was changed from Baalzebel to Beelzabub out of contempt by the Hebrews. The Hebrew change means “lord of the dung hill.”
 - (3) **“...the ruler of the demons.”** The Hebrew use of the name was understood to be a reference to the devil.
 2. Vs.25-29 Jesus responds to this allegation with an answer based on logic and the law of cause and effect. It speaks to the seriousness of their accusation.
 - a. There are three replies in Jesus’ answer.
 - (1) Vs.25-26 If he was casting out devils by the help of the prince of devils, it could only mean that in the demonic kingdom there was a schism.
 - (2) V. 27 If he was practicing exorcism by the power of the prince of devils, then they must be doing the same,

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for they were dealing with the same diseases and they had at least sometimes the same effect.

- (3) Vs 28-29 If Jesus is casting out devils- and that you do not, and cannot deny- it means that He had invaded the territory or house of Satan. The very fact that He had been successful in invading Satan's territory is proof that Satan is bound and powerless to resist.

- (a) Phillips writes: "*Satan was the 'strong man' of verse 29. He kept 'his goods' (the demoniacs in his power) tenaciously, but now One had come who was stronger than he, and this One was spoiling Satan's house.*" (John Phillips, *Exploring the Gospel of Matthew, An Expository Commentary, The John Phillips Commentary Series*, Kregel Publications, 1999, pp.223-234).

3. V.30

- a. "**gather**" is Jesus Christ. He is the gatherer.
- b. "**scatters**" is Satan. He is the one who scatters.
- c. This one sentence Jesus spoke lays down the impossibility of neutrality.
- (1) There are only two sides in life either you are for Christ or against Christ.
- (2) This represents the contrast between the two sides good (gather) and evil (scatter). There is no middle ground. And a distinction must be made between the two.
- d. "**He who is not with Me is against Me..**" The question becomes which are you are you a gatherer. If so you must be

with Christ. Or are you a scatterer in which case you must be against Christ.

- (1) In the book of Mark we see that Jesus tells us that if we are not against Him we are with Him (Mark 9:40)
- (2) Luke tells us this same thing (Luke 9:50; 11:23).
- (3) G. Campbell Morgan writes: *“Thus by one sweeping statement, true as God is true -and every man knows it is true in his deepest heart- that the Gatherer is against the scatterer, Jesus marked a clear line, dividing all He does from all the devil does, and that line is His dividing line between men. That line is the Judgement Throne. We are with Him or against Him; and we may know which by asking, Are we gathering or are we scattering?”* (G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel according to Matthew, Studies in the Four Gospels*, Flemming H., Revell Company, p.131).

E. Vs. 31-32

1. This is a severe blasphemy. To ascribe to the Lord God that His works are the works of the evil one.
2. Ironsides summarizes these verses this way: *“This was a dispensational sin, and we may say definitely cannot be committed, at least in exactly the same way, by individuals today. Jesus had come in the power of the Holy Spirit, presenting Himself to Israel as their rightful King. His mighty works, as we have seen, accredited His testimony. The only way in which men could refuse to own His grace and yet recognize His power was by attributing all His mighty works to the Devil. Those who did this gave evidence that they had sinned until their consciences were seared as with a hot iron. They had gone beyond Redemption Point, if I may use a well-known figure, not because God would not have been merciful to them if they had repented, but because they had so persisted in their sin that there was on their part no evidence of, nor desire for, repentance. Had they*

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simply spoken against the Son of Man, Jesus said it would have been forgiven them. But He solemnly added, 'Whosoever speaketh against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven, neither in this age, nor in that which is to come.'" (H. A. Ironsides, **Matthew: An Ironside Expository Commentary**, Kregel Publications, 1948, 1976, reprint 2005, pp.95-96).

F. Vs. 33-37

1. V.33 The Tree

- a. Men like a fruit tree are known by their fruits (Matthew 7:17-20; Luke 6:43-45).
- b. *"Then He made His appeal to them; 'either make the tree good, and its fruit good, or make the tree corrupt and its fruit corrupt.' Say that you know the tree is corrupt because its fruit is corrupt; or dare to say that the tree is good because its fruit is good. There is in these words the touch of a great pity, of a great desire to help these men. He appealed to them to attribute good fruit to a corrupt tree. That is what they were doing. They said that the good result, of a man freed from demon possession, was wrought by Satan. He appealed to them to be consistent; to believe on Him for the very works' sake."* (G. Campbell Morgan, **The Gospel according to Matthew, Studies in the Four Gospels**, Flemming H., Revell Company, p.132).
- c. In making this statement Jesus is revealing the inner nature of these men. He is challenging them to be honest and judge Him by His works (fruits).
- d. Jesus is asking them not to attribute bad fruit to a good tree. He is saying let the tree be known by its fruit.

2. V.34 The Vipers

- a. These are poisonous snakes known for subtle attacks with kill.
 - b. Jesus uses this term in direct revelation of the true character of these men. They are just like Satan.
 - c. It is not possible for an evil person to speak good things. Even those things which look and sound good from them are a dangerous poison.
3. V.35-37 The Heart and the Words
- a. We are exposed by the things we say, and the Pharisees were exposed by their blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. They had made bare their hearts and displayed to all the world that they were rotten to the core.
 - b. This is true even today, especially in the church. It is why the Apostle Paul tells us to “ *note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.*” (Romans 16:17; see also verses 18-19).
 - c. People like this not only destroy others they also destroy themselves.
 - d. We often forget that we are accountable for our words. Even the government tell us this. For example when a person is arrested they are told that their word will be used against them in a court of law.
 - e. So it is that our words both justify or condemn us. But by them our heart is known.
 - f.
- G. Vs. 38-41 Sign of Jonah

1. V.38
 - a. This is one of the reasons that Jesus withdrew from the leadership and the multitudes. The purpose of His “signs” was to demonstrate who He was not to entertain or dazzle men.
 - b. The sensational sign from heaven they wanted had already been given:
 - (1) The star when Jesus was born. It led the wise men to him.
 - (2) The voice from heaven at his baptism.
 - (3) The multitude of miracle healings Jesus performed.
2. V.39 Jesus castigates those who seek a sign as being evil.
 - a. One sign is not enough. In fact there is no number of signs which will convince evil people that Jesus is God. They will never be satisfied.
 - b. The only sign such people are given is the sign of Jonah.
3. V.40 The Sign of Jonah
 - a.
4. V.41
- H. V.42
- I. Vs. 43-45

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J. Vs. 46-50