

June 4, 2017

“Opposition to Jesus”

Matthew 12:25-37

FCF: Lack of reflection on eternal stakes

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Jesus speaks with clarity and compassion to those who oppose Him.

(magnet) We need to carefully weigh what He is saying.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

I picked up a new book recently, [12 Ways Your Phone Is Changing You](#), by Tony Reinke. Reinke makes the point that, though our smartphones are not all bad, they are not all good either.

They tend to amplify our addiction to distraction. Distraction from what? Three things in particular. First, from work. We procrastinate in the face of the pressures. Second, from people. Relationships can be messy. And, third, from eternity. We put off questions on meaning and direction, our doubt about God’s existence. We suppress our shame, guilt, worry, and anger.

So we grab our phone to take another hit. We’re distracted. Jesus wants our attention.

SCRIPTURE READING: [Matthew 12:25-37](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

This text has a way of grabbing our attention. It starts with a miracle. A man’s physical suffering is alleviated by a spiritual emancipation. Jesus casts out a demon and the man can see and speak again. But the miracle is not the point. The point is the confrontation that follows.

The crowds are marveling at what Jesus has done and are beginning to wonder who He is. To check that, the Pharisees make a strong declaration to the contrary. *“He casts out demons because He is possessed by a demon.”* Note no one is denying if a miracle has taken place. But they are arguing over how it has taken place. So we see the rising tide of opposition to Jesus.

How does Jesus respond to this? He does not obliterate His opponents, calling down fire from on high. Nor does He ignore them, writing them off as unworthy of His notice. Instead, Jesus engages His opponents - instructing and appealing to them. He speaks with clarity and compassion to those who oppose Him. And we need to weigh carefully what He is saying.

Our text points out three things worth noting about such opposition. First, it is logically incoherent. Second, it is utterly disastrous. And then, third, it is verbally demonstrated.

I. LOGICALLY INCOHERENT

How should we assess such opposition to Jesus? The Pharisees were learned men. But despite their training, their stance was logically incoherent. So Jesus exposes their foolishness.

A) Foolishness Exposed

1. A divided kingdom

([READ Matthew 12:25-27](#)) If what they are saying is true, Satan’s would be a divided kingdom. This would be a civil war, self-destructive. Well, Satan is certainly evil but he is not stupid.

2. Their own practice

But there's more. If what they are saying is true, they need to consider their own practice. Their followers cast out demons. If Jesus did this by Satan's power, then by whose did they do it?

B) Reality Explained

Having exposed their foolishness, Jesus then explains reality ([READ Matthew 12:28-29](#)).

1. The dawning of the kingdom

This is the dawning of the kingdom. What Jesus was doing could only be done by the Spirit of God which was a sign of the coming of the kingdom of God, His rule and reign breaking in.

2. The binding of the strong man

It is a sign of the binding of the strong man, a restraining of Satan by the one true King. Jesus had not come to collude with Satan but to overpower him. That's what this miracle shows.

So such opposition to Him, despite whatever they may think, was logically incoherent.

Application:

Now we need to understand there is still a strong man who holds his plunder tightly. Satan still has many under his sway - suffering from his deception, standing opposed to Jesus.

And the problem is not lack of evidence. The problem is that the mind follows the heart. There is a real sense that, if we have determined not to believe, we won't. So let me plead with you. If you are refusing Jesus, reconsider your position. Cross-examine your convictions.

Jesus speaks with clarity and compassion. We need to carefully weigh what He is saying.

II. UTTERLY DISASTROUS

Opposing Him is logically incoherent. And utterly disastrous ([READ Matthew 12:30-32](#)).

A) Strong Challenge

1. No middle ground

This is certainly a strong challenge. There is no middle ground. Certainly, in many areas of life, compromise and flexibility can be really good things. But not here. Not when it comes to this.

2. Necessity of choice

Here, there is the necessity of choice. It is time to take sides, to make a conclusive decision.

B) Stern Warning

Then, following that strong challenge, Jesus presses even harder with a stern warning.

1. Distinction made

He speaks of blasphemy and makes a distinction. Blasphemy against the Son is to initially reject the gospel. Blasphemy against the Spirit is to ultimately reject the gospel with full awareness.

2. Clarification needed

Some clarification is likely needed here. Dan Doriani's comments are helpful ([READ quote](#)):

Blasphemy against the Spirit is the sober, clear-minded, deliberate rejection of Jesus - as a very agent of evil - despite full knowledge of his work and in the face of the Spirit's full testimony to him. This blasphemer has heard the gospel proclaimed with clarity and power. He has watched Christians live good lives. Yet he hates Jesus and Christianity and

views it as wickedness and deceit. He hears, understands, and despises. We see how this sin is unpardonable: How can one turn to Christ and be saved, when he has seen all the evidence and rejected it as a terrible evil?

Jesus is saying, without any uncertainty, that such opposition to Him is utterly disastrous.

Application:

Let me unpack this a little more. Christians, because of God's preserving grace, cannot commit this sin. In fact, a non-Christian who fears that perhaps they have already committed this sin has not for simply having that concern rules out the very possibility. Understand that such a sin always brings with it a pungent pride, an arrogant smugness, and a settled self-satisfaction.

Put another way, if you're worried about it, you're far from it. And the fact that you are wondering about it at all may well be a sign of the Spirit's renewing work in your poor heart.

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III. VERBALLY DEMONSTRATED

One more thing. Such a stance makes no sense. And there are enormous stakes. Are there then danger signs to be aware of, symptoms to watch out for? (**READ Matthew 12:33-37**).

A) Common Image

1. Simple analogy

Jesus uses a common image here to make a simple analogy. A tree is known by its fruit. If you have good fruit then you have a good tree. But if you have bad fruit then you have a bad tree.

2. Sobering thought

It's a simple analogy but a sobering thought. What we are is revealed by what we do and say. Even our incidental offhand remarks. In fact, we could say not just "even" but "especially".

B) Dire Need

1. Future judgment

Just a little reflection on this common image will force us to see our dire need. Jesus speaks here of the certainty of a future judgment. Its certainty is tied to God's justice. And its basis is tied to our nature. That is, what and who we are most especially in regard to our stance towards Jesus.

2. Present need

So there is a sure future judgment. Which then points to our sure present need. The tree needs a transformation. Our nature needs renewal. Our hearts desperately need to be changed.

Jesus is saying, without any hesitation, that our hearts, our deepest selves, are revealed by our stance towards Him. This stance is eternally serious. And it is verbally demonstrated.

Application:

Let's be clear. This is not salvation-by-works. This is not about holy words or righteous acts. If it was, the Pharisees would have been fine for they had that down. Posturing and pretending is not what this is about. Jesus is saying that our words and actions reflect our nature and stance to Him. So our need is deep. We are great sinners. But we have a great Savior.

Jesus speaks with clarity and compassion. We need to carefully weigh what He is saying.

CONCLUSION:

As I said earlier, this text has a way of grabbing our attention. But it's not just because of what Jesus does and says here. This text grabs us because we come to it with a confusion in our minds between being nice and showing love. In many ways, those are worlds apart. Niceness is a caricature, a cheap copy, a stripped down version of love. For love is often hard and tenacious.

Let me give you a couple of examples to illustrate this. Picture the agreeable spouse that goes along with the proposal of an open marriage, thrust upon them by the other party. By going along with this disastrous idea, they may be trying to be nice. But love would absolutely refuse.

Or imagine permissive parents who allow their child to watch, click, eat, or listen to whatever; dress, speak, or act however; go out wherever whenever with whomever they please. They may be trying to be nice. But love would set out, explain, and enforce some guidelines.

My point? Too many of us - both inside and outside the church - think of Jesus as being nice. Look carefully at this text. Jesus is not nice to us. He loves us. He speaks with clarity and compassion to those who oppose Him. Oh, how we need to carefully weigh what He is saying.

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