

# Matthew 12:22-37

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[ 0 : 00 ] In Matthew 12 and verse 22 to 37. And I want to speak to you this morning on the subject that ministers and preachers don't like to speak on.

! I want to speak to you on the subject of war. I'm not the wars that we remember as lots of anniversaries out there at the moment with wars. But this war has outlived every other conflict through history.

Every other conflict compared to this war has been short-lived. It has been small-scale. But this warfare to which Jesus makes reference to in a kind of more expanded way here in Matthew 12 than in any other parts of the Gospel.

This war has been going on since the beginning of time. And there's been no peace. And it's intensified undoubtedly at the coming of the Lord Jesus into the world.

And in the course of his ministry. One day it will end. It will end at Jesus' return in glory. And the consummation of God's purposes.

[ 1 : 08 ] But this war covers the whole earth. There is no corner of the world where this war is not being fought. And there is not one of us this morning who is not involved in this war.

Because Jesus said, did you see it in verse 30? Did you notice that? That whoever is not with me is against me.

And he who does not gather with me scatters. That we are engaged this morning in this conflict.

There is absolutely no doubt. And the only question for you this morning and for me is which side are you on? And that question is settled, Jesus tells us, by our commitment to him.

He who is not with me is against me. And at the centre of this war that I'm describing is the church of Jesus Christ.

[ 2 : 12 ] A little bit later on in Matthew's Gospel in chapter 16, we'll get there in a few months. At Caesarea Philippi we'll read of Jesus setting out really what in many ways is the agenda for the rest of his ministry.

And what is Jesus' agenda this morning? He is saying, I will build my church and the gates of hell, the forces of hell will not prevail against it. Now you notice how Jesus is describing to the disciples what he is going to do in the world.

And beneath all the things that we read in the Gospels about Jesus, this is the underlying reality.

That Jesus first is going to build a church. That is his fundamental business.

That is his number one priority for which Jesus came. He came to redeem. He came to call to himself, to gather to himself a people.

So he says, priority number one, I will build my church. But secondly, he tells us, doesn't he, in that little statement, that the forces of hell are going to be combined to resist the building of this church.

[ 3 : 20 ] Of his church. The gates of hell is a description of the forces of evil and the powers of evil. And the third thing tells us that resist as they may, they will not prevail.

That resistance by the powers of evil will not be successful. On this occasion in Matthew 12 and verse 22, Jesus' discussion of this whole area of the ultimate war that is taking place in the world.

That puts all other wars, no matter how horrific, into the shade. And the occasion which he discusses this is a contrariety with the Pharisees.

You'll remember from the reading that there is a demon-possessed man, who is 22, who is both blind and mute, and was brought to him and he healed him.

So that the man, without ever having seen a speech therapist, spoke. And without having been to an optometrist, saw. So wonderfully understated.

[ 4 : 24 ] And Jesus deals with that man and his demon possession. And as he does so, there are two opposing views of how he does it. Two opposing views of how he casts out the demon.

And how he brings the man who could not speak to speak, and the man who could not see to see. Verse 23, the first response is, and the people hazard a guess, is this the son of David? That is, is he the one we've been waiting for? Is he the one who was promised in the Old Testament, and the whole of the Old Testament has been building up to? Is he the king? King David's greatest son. Is he the one descended from the royal line of David? He is. You'll remember that when Jesus makes his triumphant journey on that donkey into Jerusalem, what do they say?

They call upon his name, don't they? And they say, Hosanna to the son of David. That is, that they recognise at that point they're coming to the Messiah. And here the people are asking, could it be? [ 5 : 28 ] Can this be? Can this be? Is this finally the one who we've been waiting for? Because when the Messiah came, the whole world of the demonic would bow at his word.

And they would be dealt with. The demons would be dealt with by his authority. And so in verse 23, the people, all the people were amazed.

And say, can this be the son of David? But in verse 24, there's a very different reaction. The Pharisees dismiss what Jesus has done as the work of the prince of demons.

Beelzebul. It's probably a word for Satan himself. But when the Pharisees heard about what he'd done to the demon-possessed blind-moot man, they said he's only done it by the power of Beelzebul, the prince of demons.

The word literally means, I'm kind of lord of the flies. It's only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this fellow draws out, drives out demons.

[ 6 : 37 ] Now this passage that was read, I'm sure as you can hear it being read, raises all sorts of questions. And it's very easy to miss, I think, the central thrust. And more important than demon-possession, and more important, even than I think, the sin against the Holy Spirit, against the Holy Spirit, which we read of in verses 31 to 32, is this central theme of conflict.

The conflict between Christ and Satan. And I want us to try and grasp four things this morning. Four things that seem to be dominant in our Lord's teaching.

There's more here than I can deal with. But four things about this particular fundamental war. The first is, the competence in it. Who are the competence in it?

That's a possible way of saying, who's fighting it? Who's fighting it? Who are the competence in this war? Jesus speaks, as he, of two kingdoms sat against each other. And at the end of verse 26, when he asks the Pharisees, he says, if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself, how then will his, Satan's kingdom, stand?

So the first competence is the kingdom of Satan. The other is in verse 28. But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, Jesus says, then the kingdom of God has come upon you, or among you.

[ 8 : 04 ] So you have two spheres of power and rule. You have the sphere in which Satan is recognized as Lord by his minions.

And then you have the sphere of the rule of God. And they are irreconcilably against each other. Set against each other. And these two spheres, these two kingdoms, are headed by two princes.

The devil, well, verse 24, he is the prince of demons. He uses that language. And Jesus is, by contrast, he is the prince and saviour whom God has highly exalted according to Acts 5.

And so you have this conflict between Christ and Satan. And that is the underlying theme of the whole of the Gospels. And it's a vital thing for you and I to cross.

What is happening from the very beginning? What is happening at the start of Jesus' life? The book of Revelation tells us, for example, that when Herod went to slaughter the innocents at the beginning of Jesus' life, do you remember?

[ 9 : 14 ] Kill all those baby boys in Bethlehem. But what was happening there? That is an attempt to destroy the one who is coming. That is an attempt to destroy the kingdom of God's kingdom.

Why did Jesus come? Why are we told Jesus came? Jesus came to destroy the works of Satan. And that is how the New Testament describes what Jesus has come to do.

The Son of God appeared to destroy the works of the devil. And from the beginning, right from the beginning, there's this conflict. So then you come to the beginning of Jesus' public ministry where he's baptised.

And he's driven out by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness. And there he summons the Prince of Darkness onto the battlefield in the wilderness. And he canvies him and he beats him.

He experiences the onslaught of the devil. And that is a thread which goes right through Jesus' ministry. That at every crucial point, what is our Lord doing?

[10:18] He is engaging in this ultimate conflict, this ultimate war. Between the whole world of evil and the kingdom of God. That's why you find, for example, in that 16th chapter when Jesus says, I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

Almost immediately, Simon says, doesn't he, Jesus, the way that you're going to build this kingdom by dying the death of a sin bearer on the cross, that is not an idea, Jesus, you want to entertain. And Jesus immediately says, do you remember what he says? Get behind me, Satan. Because Jesus recognizes that the real issue in the whole of his ministry, and not only so, it goes into the book of Acts, doesn't it?

But the real warfare that the church of Jesus Christ is involved with is that against Satan. So think about chapter 5, you're about Ammonia, and Sapphira, and they imperil the church, don't they? The church is at risk. The church of Jesus Christ is at risk of being eroded with deceit, and lies, and hypocrisy, and the apostles say to them, do you remember what they say? They say, why has Satan filled your hearts to lies with the Holy Spirit?

[11:37] And all the way through, through you discover that is exactly what is happening. The competitors are the kingdom of Satan and the kingdom of God. And they are headed up by two princes, the prince and saviour, who is our Lord Jesus Christ, and the prince of darkness.

And as the shadow of the cross comes into sharper focus, again, do you remember, Jesus speaks of it to his disciples, and he says, the prince of this world comes and has nothing in me.

Now the sign that the kingdom of God has come upon them is that Jesus is defeating the minions and the messengers of Satan. It is, if I drive out demons by the spirit of God, verse 28, it is by the spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

And so there's not only two kingdoms, and not only two princes, we are every one of us caught up in this world. Not one of us. And I want to press this home to you this morning, not one of us is excluded from it.

You might not want to accept that. It is, I think, completely absent in pretty much nearly every evangelistic book that is published at the moment. But we are either in one army or the other.

[13:03] There is a total mobilisation of the world. And we are either in Christ's army or we are in Satan's army.

Because Jesus says, he who is not with me is against me. There is no middle ground, there is no sitting on the fence. And we are all of us caught up in it. Not only, the second question that arises, not only are we, not only are we who are the competence, but secondly, what is the sphere of this war?

Where is this war? What is the sphere of this war? Well, in a more general sense, it is wherever the church of Jesus Christ is being called out and being built up.

From verse 22, you have the power of Christ, the power of Christ invading the kingdom of Satan. And he calls this man out of the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of Christ.

Because Jesus is here engaging in his great work of creating a new people of God. And the Pharisees at that point, when they see what Jesus has done, they cry out, this is the work of Satan.

[14:12] You could not get, could you, more naked opposition than that. And note, it is at this point, it is in the world of established religion.

it is in the world of churchy-anity. You ask any contemporary with Jesus in the street, where would you find the world of religion?

And they would have pointed you to the Pharisees. And they would have said, they represent the world of religion. But yet, you could not have found more naked opposition and more hostility.

And so let me just say this in passing, that the Pharisees attributing to Satan the work of Jesus, that is the essence of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

It's specific. It is looking at the work of the Lord Jesus Christ and what he has done and what he is doing and saying, that is the devil. And that's the essence of it.

[15:13] I might say a word on that later. That is the essence of what we're talking about when we say blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Let me apply this. Where are we likely to find this opposition today?

Where are we likely to find ourselves engaged in this kind of warfare? Well, wherever we are involved in seeing the church of Jesus Christ built, and I hope you realise I don't mean a building,

literally, but seeing the body of Christ built, that will certainly attract opposition.

That's why, isn't it, when Jesus, as it were, took the field in his public ministry, when he was born and entered it upon his ministry, there is this huge increase in the activity of the demonic.

It was because Jesus was standing there as the one who has come to destroy the works of the devil, that he drew out the demonic. And that is why there is more demonic activity there at that point in scripture than at any other time.

let me try and press in more. When you're engaged in building the church of Jesus Christ, wherever, however, whenever, in whatever capacity, you will find that people will be hindered in coming to repentance and faith.

[ 16 : 35 ] You will find that people will be hindered in spiritual growth. and they will be hindered in Christian service. Do you remember the Apostle Paul he writes, I had intended to come to you so often, but Satan hindered me, he said.

You will find that people will become confused about the truth and will have so many into their minds doubts about it. And it's happened from the very beginning of time.

You will find that people become alienated from each other and the conflict becomes very personal. I often see in church life a petty and stupid conflict between people.

I can tell you numerous examples, I can think of a church I know well, and the church suffered great hindrance and loads of problems because two leaders in the church fell out. One of them had discovered the other one taking his place in a particular activity and he resented it deeply.

It turned into turf war, a power struggle, resentment. They avoided each other, they spoke politely or coughing tea, but they spoke more often against one another behind each other's back.

[ 17 : 57 ] They went into a huff with each other, there was a cold war, there was no harsh words, no public blow up, just avoidance. I know it's possible, I think, to go to those men and say to them, will you please, please, please grow up and will you stop being so stupid?

But actually there was something very sinister behind it because what happened is it put people off the church and it put people off the gospel and it puts people off the Lord Jesus.

And that's why when you have little silly falling out in church life, when you have that sort of thing going on in church you must realise it's not just a human phenomenon. Because Paul says we wage war not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers.

And that is the kind of realistic place where the war is waged. And no wonder Jesus says he put things right with your brother and sister, get things right and then come and make your offering. You see the nasty campaign that's going on in Laudet, the church where I preached last week, against them being able to buy this land that has all the sophistication of a kind of modern secular world.

It's not very hard is it when you come to a passage like this to see behind that is a personal enemy. But just notice a more specific help that Jesus deals with.

[ 19 : 34 ] It's worth studying on its own from verses 25 to 28. That Jesus is saying, and I think this is so helpful, that it's often a battle for the mind. So verse 25, Jesus known their thoughts.

He said to them, every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself.

How then will his kingdom stand? And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? They were saying, weren't they, they were saying, you are casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub.

the prince of demons. So it was the devil casting out the devil. Jesus says, this is utterly irrational. It's like having a rowing team with eight rowers, and four are in the boat, four are rowing one way, and the other four are rowing the other way. What happens? It's just nonsensical, isn't it?

[ 20 : 39 ] And so it is with the devil, casting out the devil. Jesus points out that it is utterly irrational. You see, the unreasonableness of the whole realm of Satan's thinking.

It's so often striking isn't it? How can the kingdom divide it against itself sound? If Satan is casting out Satan, then the whole kingdom is going to collapse, which is manifestly not done.

He's pointing out to them, isn't he, the utter irrationality of so much of what the devil does in our mind. And we need to be aware, don't we?

We need to be aware when something is so ridiculously irrational, like the transgender movement, like so much of what we hear from the K-lobby, we need to recognise that behind that.

It's not flesh and blood. We must be careful of the sinister, irrational way the devil begins to invade our minds and oppress us.

[ 21 : 49 ] Here's the third thing, competence in the warfare, the sphere of which it's fought out, and thirdly, the strategy of Christ in this war. It's compared in verse 29, to entering the house of a strong man. It's a great illustration.

You've a strong man, and then an even stronger man who comes and ties him up before carrying off all his possessions. But when somebody comes into a strong man's house, who has lots of gold, and lots of possessions, well, the person breaking in needs to be stronger.

Not to deal first with the possessions, but to deal with the strong man himself. And Jesus is clearly describing himself as he is saying, I'm stronger than the strong man. I'm the one who comes in and I bind the strong man by spoiling his goods.

And that of course is in so many ways the way that Christ deals with the kingdom of evil. When he's in the world, what is he doing? He's not tinkering with the odd demon here or there.

We've missed the point, and that's our whole focus. No, he goes to the headquarters of evil, to the strong man himself, and what is Jesus doing on the cross? He is disarming Satan. He's defeating him by his death on Calvary.

[ 23 : 07 ] So listen to how Paul puts it in Colossians 2.15. He has disarmed the powers and authorities, and he's made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. Jesus' strategy is to deal with the prince of darkness himself.

And what has happened by the cross and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ? Well, it's this, it's that Satan has been defeated. He's not yet been destroyed. That will happen, won't it, when Revelation 20 is fulfilled, and Satan will not only be defeated, but destroyed and cast out forever. But Satan is defeated now, and we need to recognize that. There are these two great errors that churches make in this connection. One is the error of ignoring Satan and laughing at him.

You think of this kind of horn-headed, fork-carrying, spiky-tailed monster that really is a laughable figment of imagination, a cartoon character. Will God help you if you think it's that?

But the other extreme is that there are people, aren't there, they become more Satan conscious than God conscious. And the whole balance and the emphasis in the New Testament is that in Jesus Christ there is victory not only over Satan, but over Satan and all his kingdom.

[ 24 : 26 ] There's a beautiful illustration of this in the Old Testament tucked away. Let's think of that lovely little story of Elisha's servant at Dothan.

And Elisha's servant comes to his master and he sees, outside their little bungalow, he sees the host of the Midianite army surrounding the whole of the mountain.

He sees the enemy, he sees the horses and the chariots, and Elisha says to him, he says, more are they that are for us than be for them.

Elisha's servant goes back out and he looks back at the mountainside and it's filled with the horses and the chariots of the enemy and he runs back to Elisha and he says to Elisha, will you not look at reality, man?

And Elisha prays to see, he prays, Lord, open the mountain's eyes. And then the young man goes back outside and he opens his eyes and when he opens his eyes, well, God opens his eyes, he sees that the mountain is full of the horses and the chariots of the Lord.

[ 25 : 37 ] And there are more of the horses and the chariots and the angels of the Lord, more of them that be for us than they that be for them. God's victory was glorious that day.

The apostle John says, greater is he that is in you than he was in the world. Now that's the strategy of Jesus.

Therefore, he's dealt with our foe, with our enemy, and so Martin Luther says, a word shall quickly slay him. Last thing, what's the final outcome of this war? What's the final outcome of this war?

Well, the indication is given in this illustration is given in verse 22. The casting out of every demon. The final outcome is simply foreshadowed again and again through the gospel.

That it will be at the coming of our saviour when Satan will not only be defeated, but destroyed. And so the last issue is, I think for you and I this morning, is we've got to decide whose side you're on.

[ 26 : 44 ] Because whether you like it or not, we're all engaged in the fight this morning. how do I know we're on the right side? Well, Jesus gives you three indications. Verse 30, the first is by the commitment we show.

The second side, the sign we're on the right side is in verse 33, it's the fruit that we bear. And the third is in verse 34, following the words that we speak. Let's take them in reverse order.

You will know them by the words they speak. Verse 34, you brood of vipers, you bunch of snakes, how can you speak good when you're evil, for out of the abundance of the hearts the mouth speaks. He goes on to speak about the significance of the tongue, and the words we speak, and the things we say. Why? Well, because the words we say are an index of our heart. And so remember that every time this week, when you're tempted to let a careless, Christless, godless word out of your lips.

That by your words will you be acquitted, and by your words will you be condemned. Secondly, it's a fruit we bear, verse 33, I either make the tree good and its fruit bad, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit.

[ 28 : 00 ] How do you know inside your arm? By the words you speak, by the fruit you bear in your life, in terms of character. And here's the last thing, which in a sense is the first, it is by your commitment we shall.

Look at verse 30. Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me, statters. And the evidence of being on the Lord's side, and the evidence of being on the Lord's side is that we're with him.

And so can I ask you to imagine this morning that the Lord Jesus Christ is walking around this room, and he goes round chair by chair, through the whole of the gathering and he says these five words, he says, with me or against me.

He stops in every chair, with me or against me. because that is the issue, nothing matters more than the level of our commitment to Jesus Christ.

Nothing. And how the war goes here in this place, which will largely depend upon that. And may God help us that we would have such clarity in our lives, that nobody could possibly mistake which side we're on.

[ 29 : 29 ] Let's pray.