

Matthew 12:38-50

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[0 : 00] And most of Matthew 12, if you've been here the last few weeks, is the account of a considerable controversy. It's a controversy really between religion and the Lord Jesus, between the Pharisees and the teachers of the law and the Son of God.

And it strikes you, I hope, that as you read this chapter, that the bitterest opposition that Jesus experiences does not come from out there, the bitterest opposition that the gospel experiences is always from the religious establishment of the time.

And that reappears again in verse 38. You'll notice that some of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law says to him, and Jesus addresses them.

And you might have noticed there are three main paragraphs, three sections, and they're really kind of red lines. Red lines of warning that you shouldn't cross. A flag of warning to us, and to the Pharisees and the teachers of the law.

And the three warnings come out really clearly, let me tell you what they are. Verses 38 to 42 is the danger of religion without true repentance. In verses 43 to 45, the second red flag is a warning of religion without regeneration.

[1 : 28] And regeneration means being born again. And the third red warning is, and from verses 46 to 50, the warning of religion without true righteousness.

Without living out a true living relationship with God. So religion without repentance. Religion without regeneration. Religion without righteousness.

Three things. And firstly, verses 38 to 42, religion without repentance. And you'll notice that it begins with Pharisees. They make a demand of Jesus. The language is the language of insisting. It's not a request. It is a demand. It's an insistence. They say to him, teacher, we demand that you perform a miraculous sign. And the reason for their insistence is they are looking for something. Looking for something that would be a final evidence. A final proof that he really was who he said he was. Jesus, can you now, at this moment, prove to us your authority?

[2 : 33] That you really are the Messiah. And you cannot be struck, but be struck by the kind of arrogant, proud spirit of these Pharisees and teachers of the law.

We're not quite sure yet, they say Jesus. And we've not entirely made up our mind about you. We need a sign. We need more evidence. And Jesus refuses the sign.

He refuses their demand that they ask for. And he does so for a number of reasons. One is that he's already given, hasn't he, some pretty dramatic and remarkable signs. Chiefly, he's healed the sick.

He's delivered those who were in bondage to demons. He's raised the dead. And when he gave them these dramatic signs, what did they do?

Well, they attributed them to the devil. They said, you're doing this by the devil. He cast out the devils by the prince of devils, they say. And it's clearly not signs that they need.

[3 : 37] Because the signs that they'd already seen didn't make the blindest bit of difference to their hard, unbelieving hearts. And Jesus refuses them. And he refuses not only because of that, but because there's an abundance of sign and evidence in the Old Testament.

The Old Testament that they taught. The Old Testament that they spent their lives studying. That if they only knew what the Old Testament had studied, taught, they would see that there were plenty of signs.

All their study was focused. And the Old Testament is full of evidences and signs. And Jesus raises one of them. He says the only sign that will be given to this generation is the sign of the prophet Jonah.

There's so many ways in which that story of Jonah, the prophecy of Jonah and the life of Jonah and the ministry of Jonah was a sign to his own generation and to this one.

And Jesus particularly says, doesn't he, the sign of the prophet Jonah is going to be fulfilled in me. He says, because Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights, so will the son of man be in the ground for three days and three nights and then he'll be raised out of it.

[4 : 54] And you can see, can't you, how Jonah becomes a picture of Jesus' death and resurrection. The ultimate sign. Therefore, not for them and then for us.

It's going to be the death and the resurrection of Jesus. If you're worried about the three days and the three nights. And that Jesus died on Good Friday. And he rose on Sunday morning.

And the Jewish way of reckoning time, reckoned that one part of a day. They reckoned that as the whole of that day and night. So three days and three nights would have been encompassed by Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

That's the way the Jewish people reckon time. And that's incidental. In case you were distracted by it. I thought I was just scratching further. But that's the point of the three days and the three nights. And the whole purpose of Jesus citing Jonah is that here is a sign that God did. And what did you make of that sign, he says? And he thrusts it in more deeply when he said the great issue is how the people of Jonah's day responded to Jonah and his preacher.

[6 : 06] And how did the people of my day respond to me and my teacher? So let's go back. Let's say, what did they do in Nineveh?

Well, in Nineveh, when Jonah went and preached to them, what happened? There was, wasn't there, the most remarkable revival in history. From the king on his throne to the most ordinary peasant on the road, the whole of Nineveh is summoned to repentance.

They get on their knees and confess their sins before God. And so the king says, let us seek God together. Can you imagine it's happening in a contemporary situation in our world where a king says, let us, let the whole country, every single one of us, let us seek God.

And it may be that there is time for us to persuade him to be gracious. Perhaps he will have mercy on us. And they called upon God.

And they repented. They put on sackcloth. They threw ashes up into the air to show how sorry they were as a nation. And now Jesus says, the men of Nineveh who repented, the people who understood God's message and acted on it, they will rise up in judgment.

[7 : 29] Against this generation. Why? Well, I'll tell you one reason. The Ninevehites were pagans, weren't they? The people of Nineveh, they were unprivileged.

They were unprivileged pagans. They assured that there was a God who had revealed himself. And that there was a God of the whole earth. And that one day that God will come in judgment.

And even those people that knew so little, even they repented. And the prophet went to them. The prophet went to them. Jonah was a rather mixed up soul, wasn't he?

A very mixed up soul who disobeyed God at the beginning. And then God had to come back to him. And at the end of the book of Jonah, Jonah is as unhappy as he is at the start.

He's in the trouble that God had with Jonah. In his disobedience. He had to pursue him to the depths and sin. But here is the Son of God. The Lord Jesus Christ.

[8 : 31] And he preaches to them. And he pleads with them. And he teaches them. And he urges them. The hard, unbelieving hearts of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law.

And they outrightly reject him. And they dismiss him. And now he says there's another example. What about someone else? What about someone from the opposite ends of the world?

Who came? Somebody who was in every sense a kind of upper class pagan. The Queen of Sheba. And she came in all her sophistication in verse 42.

She comes from the other side of the world. Because it had been told her that there was a king. King Solomon. In another land who had wisdom. Who had the wisdom of God.

And so she makes this epic journey. And she comes to sit at his feet. And to learn from him. And Jesus says the Queen of the South. That is the Queen of Sheba.

[9 : 30] The place was originally probably Yemen. He says the Queen of the South will rise up against this generation. Why? Because she came from the end of the world.

To sit at the feet of Solomon. And I tell you that one greater than Solomon is here this morning. And one greater than Jonah is here this morning. And she crossed the world.

To listen to the wisdom of Solomon. But you won't cross the street. To listen to the lips of the Lord Jesus Christ. Who speaks to you of things that are eternal.

And so he refuses then to sigh. These men. These Pharisees and teachers of the law. They are set before us.

As a hideous example. Of what it is to have a really hard. Unbelieving heart. Of course it's dressed up in religious clothing.

[10:31] But deep down. It was resisting. The grace of God. And the one thing that Jesus says they lack. Is the reality of repentance. Of turning from their own ways.

And turning back to God. The men of Nineveh repented. But in these men there's no repentance. There's no humbling themselves.

There's no begging for forgiveness. Here's the second danger flag. And it's the danger of religion. Without regeneration. Verses 43 to 45. Regeneration means being born again.

Being born again by God's spirit. Jesus illustrates that with. The story of a man who has somehow managed to rid himself. Of the evil. That has inhabited him.

It was an evil spirit. Demonic power. And as Jesus begins the story. The evil spirit has left him. And when an evil spirit.

[11:32] Goes out of a man. It goes to arid places. But it does not find rest. And the picture is. Of an evil spirit. Having left the man.

As they've witnessed. And it had gone out into a kind of wilderness area. Now that happened didn't it. A number of times in Jesus' ministry.

It's happened already in Matthew chapter 12. And while the man had known what it is. Somehow or other. For the demonic power. To get out of his life. He began at that point.

A kind of self-centered reformation. Of his own life. He kind of. Began to try and sort his own life out. To pull up his own shoelaces.

And Jesus pictures his life. As if it was a house. And look at what he says. Look at verse 44. The king of heaven is like. Treasure hidden in a field.

[12:29] Which a man found uncovered up. Then in his joy. He goes. No. Sorry. That's Matthew 13. Matthew 12. And verse 44. Then it says.

I will return to my house. From which I came. And when it comes. It finds the house. Empty. Swapped. And put in order. Now again. Jesus is clearly using here. An illustration.

It's a vivid. Kind of. Religious life. Based on. Reformation. There's been. Kind of a cleaning up. Of his act. Manners.

Habits. By personal effort. And what has happened. Is this man. The demon has gone out of him. This man says. I need to. I need to sort out my act. I need to put my life in order. I've got to get rid of this.

Dreadful power. That has been troubling me. All these years. And now I'm going to set my life to right. And he does so. He sweeps it. He puts his life in order. It's a personal reformation. And by itself.

[13:28] It's a perfectly good thing. But the trouble is. That this man's life. Was absolutely empty. And it was therefore. An open invitation. Jesus says. For the powers.

Powers of darkness. To come back. And to invade it. The real trouble. You see. Is that this man's life. Was empty. Not in the sense. Of being dull.

It's not that this man. Had nothing to do. Or he had nothing. That interested him. And we often speak. Of people's lives. Being empty. In that sense. He or she. Leads a rather.

Empty life. I don't think. That's the point. Here at all. It may have been. In a worldly sense. Really full. May have had.

Loads of possessions. May have had. Lots of friends. But what it was. Empty of. It was empty. Of the presence. Of the living God. It was empty.

[14:24] Of the presence. Of the living God. For whom that life. Had been formed. And created. And that is what. Made it empty. There's a man. Who wrote a book.

A Scotsman. Called Henry Scroogle. Henry Scroogle. And wrote a book. Which influenced. Some really remarkable people. Like George Whitefield. The great. Eighteenth century evangelist. It opened.

George Whitefield's eyes. To see. What is the real truth. Of Christianity. What is. Real Christian religion. Do you know what the title. Of that book was. Still in print.

It's called. The life of God. In the soul of man. The life of God. In the soul of man.
And that is exactly. What this man. In Matthew 12. His life lacked. He did not have. The life of God.
In the soul. Of man. An empty life.

[15:20] In that sense. An empty life. In that sense. It's an absolutely. Perfect field. For the devil.
It's coming and fill. You see. The trouble. Was. That there was.

No new life. In this man's soul. To make. The reformation. Tournament. Now you and I.
We know exactly. All about this. January the first. We're going to have. A reformation. In the lady
life. But here we are. A month later. And you know.

What happens. We know. Don't we. Personal resolution. You know. It doesn't work. You know.
What happens. When it's only done.

By personal resolution. The personal resolution. Dies as quickly. As it comes. And that's a picture.
Of religion. Without. Regeneration. Without the life.

[16:16] Of God. In the soul. Of man. Without. An indwelling. God. And saviour. Who. From within.
Fills us.

With all the fullness. Of God. And makes us. His dwelling. So let me ask you. Is that your kind of
religion. This morning. Is your religion.

Distinguished. By. This characteristic. That Paul. Himself. Put so simply. That Christianity. Can be
summed up. As. Christ. Lives. In me. Nothing.

Could be simpler. Than that. Could it. Christ. Lives. In me. That is what Christianity. That is what
we're. Primarily about. Christ. And so there's a warning flag.

That goes up. First of all. Religion. Without. Repentance. Is real. And secondly. Religion. Without.
True. Regeneration. Without being born again.

[17:10] By God's spirit. Is real. And the third danger of religion. Is the danger of religion. Without
true righteousness. Jesus. You remember the key verse.

Of Matthew chapter 12. It's in verse 30. Just read it again. That key verse. Whoever is not with me.
Is against me. And so Jesus there. Recognizes. That the world is divided. Into those who are. With
him. And those who are. Against him. And by this time.

It's really apparent. Isn't it. At the end of Matthew chapter 12. Where the Pharisees are. What is
their decision. They were against him. And that was going to multiply. Until it came to the point.
Where they were screaming. And baying for his blood. But more surprisingly. In Matthew chapter
12. It seems. So were his family. Against him too.

[18:11] It's one of the most. Isn't it. Profoundly painful things. To read in the gospels. That Jesus.
His own family. His own flesh and blood. Seemed to have completely. Misunderstood him.

And opposed him. In John chapter 7. And verse 5. We read that. Jesus' brothers. Did not believe in
him. Mark 3.

Verse 21. There's an even more. Emphatic statement. That they thought. He was going mad. And
so they wanted to. Kind of drag him back home. To sort him out. He'd not been the kind of.

Saviour. That they had expected. Or the kind of son. Or the kind of brother. And there's probably.
Great symbolism. In Matthew chapter 12. Verse 46. While he was still.

Speaking to the people. Behold. His mother. And his brothers. Stood outside. They're on the
outside.

[19:09] We know. Don't we. As you read on. In the story of redemption. We know. That by the
time. We get to Acts chapter 1. This story. Is wonderfully changed.

By the beginning. Of the book of Acts. We find Jesus' mother. And brothers. They join the disciples.
In the upper room. And they too. Are waiting. For the coming.

Of the Holy Spirit. Jesus. One of Jesus' earthly brothers. Became the leader. Of the church. In
Jerusalem. So the situation. Has changed. Dramatically. By the time. You come to the book of Acts.
Jesus. Has to point out. To them. And all. Were gathered round. For someone. Came from the
outside. And said to him. Your mother.

And brothers. Are outside. And they are calling. For you. And Jesus. Asked the question. Who is my
brother. Who is my mother.

[20:10] And who are my brothers. Jesus. Was not lacking. In personal. Family affection.

It wasn't that Jesus. Had a bad family relationship. We know. At the cross. Don't we. While he is on
the cross. He points to his. Friend. John. And he points to his.

Mother. And he says to John. Behold your mother. And he says. To Mary. Behold your son. That John was to look after his mom. He cared for his mom. And he is burdened. And he is concerned. What is going to happen to him. Happen to his mom. After he is gone. What Jesus is doing here there. Is Jesus is showing you. That mere pedigree.

Mere pedigree. Does not bring a true relationship. Does not bring a true relationship. With him. A mere family connection. Or an outward.

[21 : 10] Physical relationship. Does not mean. That we belong to his true family. We have great privileges. We are part of the covenant.

People of God. But mere family connection. Does not mean. That we belong to his true family. And when he asked the question. Who is my father. And who are my brothers. Jesus answered himself. Can you see what he says. He says. They are those. Who do the will. Of my father. Who is in heaven. In verse 50. They are those.

Who do the will. Of my father. That is in heaven. If we were to ask. Jesus. In this new family. That you are creating. Because it is not.

Just a new kingdom. It is a new family. In this new family. That you are creating. How do we recognize. Members of your family. What is the great family likeness. That you look for. What is the unmistakable feature.

[22 : 12] Of Jesus family. So you know what it is like. In families. In your family. In some cases. It is a nose. In others. It is hair.

Or the lack of it. In some. Others. It is the eyes. In some families. It is the height. That you can tell. Who is in the family.

Or not. There is. Unmistakable feature. In families. Oh that person. Is a. Leaving. That person. Is a. Voynacoth. You can tell.

Can't you. In our families. Often straight away. And so in Jesus family. What is the unmistakable feature. Can you see it in verse 50. They do. My father's.

Will. That is the mark of belonging. To the family. You can profess. All you want. You can say. You've made. This statement. Or that statement. You can even say. You're a member of the church.

[23 : 06] But if you don't obey. The father's will. Jesus says. You're not in the family. That is like the blood. Running through the family. Not the external.

Righteousness. Not the do this. And the do that. Of the Pharisees. Not the personally. Worked up. Righteousness. And the good resolutions. Of the teachers of the law. But the righteousness.

Of those who come into the family. By the new birth. Because they want to do. The father's will. Above everything. I think there's something. Very beautiful about this.

Isn't there? But that is true. Christian religion. That in our lives. There is a family likeness. That we want to do. The will of the father. And some of you.

Need to ask yourself. This morning. Why is it. That you don't want to do. The will of the father. Of course.

[24 : 02] We see the family likeness. Don't we? Most of all. In the head of the family. Jesus. Himself. Quite.

And self-consciously. Says. I always do my father's will. It is my meat. And my drink. To do the will of him. Who sent me. To finish the work. And Jesus said.

He will see. That in those. Who are truly. My sisters. And brothers. And mothers. And so on. Well. You'll see. An obedience. To the father's will. But don't miss the positive. Before we finish.

Jesus is talking about his meat. In verse 50. His disciples. But have you ever really thought about this? I find this mind blowing. Jesus means his disciples. To have an intimacy with him.

And a relationship with him. That is deeper. Than his own mother. In the flesh. And his own brothers. In the flesh.

[25 : 00] He means to draw his disciples. Into such a relationship with himself. So you know how it is in your family. There are times. I often say to people. When they're grieving. There's been a bereavement.

There's a sense in which. The only people that can really understand. Are those within your own family circles. Are the only ones to understand. The level of loss. Because there is a bond. Isn't there? In family.

There's a bond of blood. That is different. From every other. But Jesus says. Even deeper than that. Is the relationship. I want to draw you into. And he says. To the weakest. And to the lowest. And the neediest of us. Neediest of us. He says. You are my brother. You are my sister. You're like my mother.

Those who do the will of my father. They are my sister. And my brother. And my mother. Are you a brother of Jesus.

[26 : 00] This morning. A sister of Jesus. A mother of Jesus. Because.

The family evidence. Is there in your life. In true righteousness. Let's pray together. Let's pray together.