

Matthew 12:22–50 — The Great Turning Point

The Blasphemy Against the Holy Spirit, The Moral Break with Israel, The Son of Man, The Kingdom in Mystery Form, and Gentiles Brought Near

Scripture Reading: Matthew 12:22–50; 13:1–3

“Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw. And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David?”

“Whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.” (Matthew 12:50)

Matthew as the Gospel of the King: Design in the Books

The books of the New Testament have a design, and that design is not of human origin but of the divine mind. To deny this is to ensure one never finds it. Matthew’s gospel is the first of the four living creatures — the lion, the Lion of the tribe of Judah. He came first in humiliation, but he came as the king. This is the gospel that presents the Lord Jesus as the king of Israel, and it is highly governmental and dispensational in character. That is why, uniquely among the four gospels, it uses the expression the kingdom of the heavens — an expression with dispensational bearing. And that is why, in this specifically Jewish gospel, we find both the church and the mystery form of the kingdom introduced: because Israel was losing its place as the sphere where God’s will and order would be administered, and a new body was coming into view.

John the Baptist opened the testimony by preaching the kingdom of the heavens as at hand. The Lord Jesus took up the same message. In chapter 10 he sent the twelve to preach the same message: the kingdom of the heavens has drawn nigh. Up through chapters 11 and 12, opposition rises. And in chapter 12, a decisive and irreversible point is reached. After chapter 12, the preaching of the kingdom as at hand ceases. Something has happened that changes everything.

The Blasphemy Against the Holy Spirit: An Unforgivable Sin

What happened was this. A demon-possessed man, blind and dumb, was brought to the Lord, and he healed him. The people were amazed and said, Is not this the son of David? But when the Pharisees heard it they said, This fellow doth not cast out demons but by Beelzebub, the prince of the demons. In doing so they admitted the works — yes, he was doing them — but attributed the spiritual power working in him to the prince of demons rather than to the Holy Spirit. They were calling the Holy Spirit Beelzebub.

This was the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit for which there is no forgiveness, neither in this age nor in the age to come. Every sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men, but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven, the Lord said in verse 31. Note that even speaking a word against the Son of Man is forgivable — but this is not. The reason is that the Holy Spirit was the divine person working in Christ: every word and work of the Lord Jesus was by the power of the Spirit, from his very birth to his exaltation. These men were not merely rejecting a teacher or a prophet; they were attributing the work of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead working in the fulness of the Godhead incarnate, to the power of Satan.

This sin differs fundamentally from the sin of Ananias and Sapphira, who lied to the Holy Spirit. That was a characterizing sin at the opening of the new thing God was doing — the formation of the church, the Holy Spirit having come

down as a divine person to take care of Christ's interests in his absence. They acted as if no Holy Spirit had come. But the blasphemy here is a specific and unique sin: calling the Spirit of God who worked in Christ the prince of demons, to his face, while he stood before them. This sin required the actual presence of Christ for it to be committed. It is not committed now. But the doom of those who uttered it was sealed by the words themselves.

The Moral Break: Chapter 12 as the Pivot of Matthew

Chapter 12 is the great pivot of Matthew's gospel. What precedes is the presentation of the Lord Jesus to Israel as their king, with works of power demonstrating the kingdom and its character. What follows is entirely different in tone and posture. In chapter 13, the Lord does not come looking for fruit from Israel. He becomes a sower. That is a total change of ground. A king presenting himself and looking for response is one thing; a sower going out to scatter seed broadly is another. The change in his posture reflects the change in his relationship to the nation. This is what we may call the moral break — not the formal rejection at Calvary, but the decisive moral turning that preceded it and was its root.

Following the blasphemy, the Lord speaks of the unclean spirit returning with seven others more wicked, and the last state of that generation being worse than the first. That generation — the Christ-rejecting generation of Israel — is not merely one historical cohort. It is the generation that has been at work from Egypt onward, and it marches on until the deliverer comes out of Zion and turns away ungodliness from Jacob. The last state is when they perfect their intercourse with wicked spirits under the Antichrist. The seven spirits more wicked point to that.

Who Is My Mother and Who Are My Brethren? A New Spiritual Family

The chapter closes with a passage that is not accidental to its position. While he yet talked to the people, his mother and brethren stood outside desiring to speak to him. He answered, Who is my mother? And who are my brethren? He stretched forth his hand toward his disciples and said, Behold my mother and my brethren: for whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother and sister and mother.

This is a moral separation from the nation, corresponding to the moral rejection of himself. The natural connection he bore as an Israelite, born into the nation, is here morally set aside. His real family is not national or ethnic but spiritual: those who do the will of his Father in heaven. And the word whosoever is entirely inclusive. It is not confined to Israel. It reaches across every boundary. In this broad, open declaration, the Gentile has a door. The one who does the will of the Father in heaven is his mother, brother, sister — regardless of nation, background, or standing. This is the ground on which Gentiles who were without God, without hope, strangers from the covenants of promise, have been brought so near that they can say with full truth: nearer we cannot be.

Stephen as the Final Embassy: Cities of Refuge and the Last Opportunity

Between the moral break of Matthew 12 and the formal break at Calvary, and then beyond Calvary into the early chapters of Acts, God gave Israel a series of further opportunities. The cities of refuge in the Mosaic law provided for the man-slayer who killed without premeditation: he could flee to a city of refuge, and the avenger could not touch him while the high priest lived. Peter's preaching in the early Acts presented exactly this opportunity to those who had crucified Christ: to take the position of the man-slayer, to acknowledge that they had acted in ignorance, and to run into Christ as the great city of refuge. Peter said he knew they had done it through ignorance. There was an open door.

That door remained open until Stephen. Stephen was the final embassy. A parable in Luke speaks of a man who went into a far country to get a kingdom and return, and whose citizens sent a message after him: we will not have this man to reign over us. That message is Stephen. He laid out Israel's history of rejecting the work of the Holy Spirit point by point, and when he declared that he saw the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God, they stopped their ears. They had said we will not have him when he was here below, and now they were saying we will not have him when he is above. They stoned Stephen. That was the close of the final offer. After that, the Apostle Paul was saved, and the gospel moved out to the nations.

*Whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother,
and sister, and mother.*