

# For Him or Against Him

Matthew 12:22-37

How can two people look at the exact same event and come away with opposite conclusions? Jesus has been healing multitudes, but Matthew focuses on one demon-possessed blind and mute man whose restored sight and speech cause division. This is the second time Jesus is accused of casting out demons by the power of demons (Matt. 9:34), but this time He refutes the accusation and reveals the power at work in His kingdom.

## The Son of David

The multitudes are amazed at this exorcism and healing, asking “Could this be the Son of David?” (v. 23). The Lord told king David that He would establish a greater king from his seed and establish the throne of his kingdom forever (2 Sam. 7:12-15). David was the great Psalmist whose harp-playing drove distressing spirits away from Saul (1 Sam. 16:23). Jesus casts out demons, restoring wholeness and holiness in His kingdom. The Pharisees can’t deny the healing, so they accuse Him of casting out demons by Beelzebub, the prince of demons (v. 24). Demonic activity occurs in the Old Testament, but Matthew emphasizes the evil spiritual powers at work against Jesus. Right after His baptism He goes into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil (4:1). Throughout Israel He casts out demons (4:24; 8:16; 8:33-34; 9:32-34; 15:22) and sends His disciples to do the same (10:8). You can err by making too much of Satan and demons as well as making too little of them. Too much is made by assuming all negative things in your life are known and driven by the evil one. This puts him near or on par with God, which is the ancient Manichean heresy. Satan is not God’s opposite but rather a created, fallen angel who is neither omniscient nor omnipresent. Resist sin, and he can’t touch you (Jms. 4:7). But too little can be made either by being flippant about demonic power (cf. Jude 9), or ignorant of it altogether. Satan doesn’t wear a red suit and carry a pitchfork; he “transforms himself into an angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14). He wears a suit and tie and tells you to believe in yourself. He persuades people to worship their political leaders and influences board members at Planned Parenthood. He mainstreams gender dysphoria so little kids can begin “transitioning” from the sex they were created to be. He drives ideologies that promote hatred and violence between nations, races, and cultures.

## The Strong Man Bound

Jesus exposes the Pharisees’ contradictory accusation: “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?” (vv. 25-26). No team injures their own player in order to win the game. If Jesus casts out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do their sons cast them out (v. 27)? If they do it like Jesus (through Beelzebub), then they too are condemned. But if not, then Jesus is vindicated and *He is obviously vindicated*: “But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can one enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house” (vv. 28-29). If you’re going to break into a strong man’s house and rob him, you have to disable him first. Jesus isn’t smash and grabbing. He is filled by the Holy Spirit, traveling through Israel and healing thousands of people. They believe the good news that He comes to bear their sins, grant them repentance and faith, take their afflictions upon Himself, and heal them. The plundering tells you that Satan is bound. It’s interesting that Jesus describes Satan as already bound during His earthly ministry. John says he is bound for a thousand years so that he

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can't deceive the nations (Rev. 20:1-3), so it appears Jesus is anticipating the work of the cross. Plunder has begun in Jesus' ministry, but it will continue as the whole church is filled with the Holy Spirit. The formerly blind and mute man can now see and speak while the Pharisees are blind and unable to stop complaining and lying about what Jesus does: "He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad" (v. 30). When the kingdom of God is upon you, when you are confronted by work of Christ, you either gather to Him or you scatter. Today we don't have a few thousand people asking who He is in Galilee but billions all over the earth testifying to the life-changing power of the gospel. Some people are still blind, but this message has the power to open eyes.

## The Unpardonable Sin

This is the context for Christ's comments about the unpardonable sin, the blasphemy against the Spirit (v. 31). Anyone who speaks against Jesus will be forgiven, but not the one who speaks against the Spirit (v. 32). The action and description is very specific. These Pharisees were saying that Jesus healed by the power of demons—that He Himself was demonic, and His work was empowered by a demonic spirit. They were not in the least bit troubled by this accusation but continued with their effort to murder Him. Anyone who is concerned that they have committed the unpardonable sin, hasn't. But the warning is helpful. Not all Pharisees committed the unpardonable sin; some of them, like Paul, became Christians (Phil. 3:5). But the circumcised, trained, studious, zealous, worshipping Pharisees, taken as a whole, were blind to the work of Jesus. Some of them were so hardened that repentance was impossible (cf. Heb. 6:4-6). There are "Christians" who "call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" (Is. 5:20). They're not just blind; they insist everyone else is blind. They call biblical speech hate speech. And there are many true Christians—including not a few evangelicals—who are led and influenced by them.

## The Necessity of Regeneration

Jesus doesn't recommend remedial theology classes or a seminar to understand Him better. He doesn't need to clarify what He is saying or doing. The issue goes right down to their (and our) hearts, to the nature of the tree: "Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit" (v. 33). Good trees produce good fruit, and bad trees produce bad fruit. Bad trees tell themselves, "I'm a good person; it really doesn't make sense why I do bad things." Trees that have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit say, "Lord, forgive me because I have sinned against You and am not worthy to be called Your child, but Christ has died for me." Jesus calls these people a family of snakes who *can't* say good things because out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks (v. 34). If you say something foul, it comes out of your heart. Why do we never distance ourselves from good things we say?: "I didn't really mean that nice thing." For some reason, we only discount the awful things we do and say. But Jesus isn't having any. For every idle word, we will give an account in the day of judgment (v. 36). We are justified by faith alone apart from works, but our words will be judged (v. 37; cf. Rom. 2:5-11). Like the blind and mute man, Christ must cast the evil out of us and give us new life so we can see and praise Him. He accomplishes this through the preaching of the gospel, so believe it and walk in newness of life. Be *for* Christ and thankful for all He has done for you.