

Week 14: Matthew 12:22–50

Hook



Main Point: Whoever does the will of the Father is Jesus' brother and sister.

Show the video "Choose Daily." <https://www.rightnowmedia.org/Content/illustration/117203>

Gather into small groups to discuss the following questions.

Q: Does being a believer in Christ affect the way you live?

Q: What are some other influencers that help shape the choices you make?

Q: How does being part of our LifeGroup determine your daily activity?

Week 14: Matthew 12:22–50

Book

Main Point: Whoever does the will of the Father is Jesus' brother and sister.

Matthew 12:22–32 [Read]

Talking Point 1: If you're not with Jesus, you're against Him.

Q: Why does Jesus say He couldn't cast out demons by the power of Satan?

Q: Why does Jesus sound so harsh in dividing those who are with Him or against Him?

The Pharisees continued to challenge Jesus, accusing Him of casting out demons by the power of "Beelzebul, the prince of demons" (v. 24). They did everything they could to discredit Him in the eyes of the people, who continued to be amazed by Him (v. 23). The Old Testament law forbade magic and divination *because* it was consorting with demons and evil spirits (Deuteronomy 18:10–14). The magicians of Egypt, for example, did have magical powers, but it came from their "gods," which were not really gods but demons. When God showed His power through Moses at Pharaoh's court and then through the plagues, He initially matched the magicians, miracle for miracle. But then He blew them all out of the water, proving His power was well beyond anything their sorcerers could ever do (Exodus 7–12).

God outlawed any sort of magic, divination or incantation in His law because it was either a means of participating in the worship of other gods (which were actually demons) or an attempt to manipulate the true God into doing what they wanted Him to do. God will not be manipulated or controlled by mankind. God tells man what to do, not the other way around. Prophets, who were given supernatural power, did not use it for their own gain but only to do the will of God and to support His message. Sorcerers and magicians could be paid well for their services, but the true prophets of God did not gain fame or fortune from their miracles. Most often, they were scorned and rejected by the people for telling them what they didn't want to hear!

When the Pharisees accused Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebul, they were accusing Him of sorcery or witchcraft, which was punishable by death in the law. This was one of several attempts they made to find a legitimate reason to have Him killed. What is ironic, according to scholars, is that they accused Jesus of witchcraft while some of the Pharisee's own disciples at the time exorcised demons, too. How could they accuse Jesus, but not their own disciples, of working by the power of the devil ("your sons" in verse 27)? Even more ironic is the fact that the Jewish exorcists at the time used many techniques and incantations that could more likely be construed as magic, whereas Jesus simply commanded the demons to come out, and they immediately obeyed out of fear.¹

Jesus answered the Pharisees with a long and strong argument that drew a sharp dividing line between two opposing kingdoms, the kingdom of Satan and the kingdom of God (vv. 25–30). He used a common wise saying of the time, that a kingdom divided against itself would not stand (v. 25). Jesus said Satan would not cast out his own demons. That would be dividing his army against itself; it doesn't make sense (v. 26). Instead, Jesus claimed to cast out demons by the Spirit of God, again connecting Himself with God in a unique way (v. 28).

He also offered the Spirit's power to do miracles and cast out demons through Him as evidence that the kingdom of God had arrived (v. 28). The Pharisees believed that the Spirit of God lay dormant after the time of the prophets, during the 400 years of silence between the testaments, and that the Spirit would only be restored in the time of the kingdom. This was Jesus' claiming again that the kingdom of God had come in Him – that He is the Messiah, and this is His battlefield. Jesus' battle with Satan and his demons was "binding the strong man" and plundering his house (v. 29). This was also a common saying at the time, which Jesus used to describe the way He was attacking Satan's army, preparing for His ultimate battle with him on the Cross. Jesus had already defeated Satan in His temptation in the wilderness, before His ministry even started ("binding the strong man"). His ministry on earth, exorcising Satan's demons, was "plundering his house." The earth was Satan's "house" – his domain, his kingdom – but Jesus was taking over. His final battle would be on the Cross. New Testament scholar Craig Keener writes, "Jesus invaded Satan's domain and defeated him so that Jesus could recapture the human lives that Satan had enslaved ... Far from being authorized by the demon's ruler, Jesus had authority over the devil – one spirit that no mere magical incantation could thwart." ⁱⁱ

This sharp distinction between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan (the world) creates a clear dividing line between human citizens of each kingdom. Are we citizens of the world (Satan's domain) or citizens of heaven temporarily living on earth? If we are citizens of heaven, we will be actively fighting for Jesus' side. If we are not actively fighting for His side, then we are really against Him (v. 30). It is very black-and-white; there is no gray area. Jesus does not allow His disciples to straddle the fence or to remain passive observers of the battle. He doesn't let us have one foot in each kingdom, to worship God when it's convenient but follow the world or "other gods" when we want something from them. He demands, as God did in the Old Testament, that we choose *this day* whom we will serve (Joshua 24:14–15).

Q: How does it make you feel to know that if you don't choose Jesus, you're choosing Satan? Do you really believe that's true? Do you think your non-Christian friends believe it's true? If not, what do they think they're choosing (or not choosing)?

Q: What would it look like for you to stop straddling the fence and choose Jesus? What habits, practices, and idols would you have to give up? What practices, habits, and commitments would you have to add into your life?

Q: What would it look like for you to actively fight on Jesus' side in the battle against Satan, against evil in the world? Why do you think God wants you to fight and not just be a bystander?

Matthew 12:33–45 [Read]

Talking Point 2: Either Jesus rules your life or Satan does.

Q: How does it feel to hear that you will give an account for every careless word?

Q: Why would the Ninevites and the queen of the South judge “this generation”?

In the Old Testament law, deliberate blasphemy against God was unforgivable. Someone who sinned “with a high hand” – with blatant disregard for God or His law – was punished by the death penalty (Numbers 15:30–31). In this context, blasphemy of the Spirit specifically refers to the sin the Pharisees exhibited – hearts so hardened that they were incapable of repentance. The parties who would condemn “this generation” at the Day of Judgment were both Gentiles who had repented and turned back to God – the people of Nineveh, that Jonah didn’t even want to go preach to because they were enemies of Israel (vv. 40–41), and the queen of the South, who came to hear the wisdom of Solomon and turned to worship of God because of it (v. 42). This is similar to Jesus’ comments about Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum in just the last chapter (11:21). Even the Gentile cities of Tyre and Sidon would have repented if they had seen Jesus’ miracles and heard His teaching the way these Jewish cities in Galilee had. But God’s people, the very ones who should have *rejoiced* to hear Jesus’ message, rejected Him and His message. The image of these Gentiles rising up (being resurrected) to condemn them on Judgment Day would have horrified the Pharisees, who believed that Judgment Day would be about Israel’s vindication against the Gentile nations, their enemies.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Pharisees thought they were on God’s side, but they were really blaspheming the Spirit, the unforgivable sin. They did not recognize the power and work of God’s Spirit when they saw it in Jesus. Therefore, they did not really know God. They knew His law; they knew the rules; but if they couldn’t recognize God’s character and His heart in Jesus, they didn’t really know who He was. Some of the scribes and Pharisees asked Jesus for a sign, to prove that He was really from God (v. 38). But Jesus explained that if they really knew God, they wouldn’t need a sign. They would have recognized Him in Jesus. Because Jesus was God. Their request revealed the evil character of their hearts (v. 39). Jesus had provided them signs all along, but they doubted whether His signs were really from God. The Ninevites repented without a sign, just from hearing Jonah’s message. The queen of the South repented without a sign, just from hearing the wisdom of Solomon. Yet Jesus was greater than both Jonah and Solomon. If the Pharisees really knew God, they should have recognized God in Him. They believed they understood God’s law better than anyone, but they didn’t recognize God’s truth in the message of

Jesus. But “those who know little about Israel’s God (like the Ninevites or the Queen of Sheba or the Magi earlier in Matthew’s Gospel) are often least arrogant and hence most responsive to the gospel.”^{iv}

At the end of this section, Jesus used the metaphor of a house again, describing “this evil generation” – the Pharisees and those of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum who rejected Him – like a person who has been exorcised once but later is possessed again seven times worse (vv. 43–45). What is clear in the Greek in verse 44 is easily missed in English. The original Greek says, “if it finds the house empty” – it’s a conditional sentence. The demons will only return if the house is left empty. Remember the house represents the kingdom. If the house is “empty,” there is no ruler in that kingdom, no one sits on the throne. This emptiness doesn’t mean the house is neat and clean; it means it’s open for a takeover. There is an empty space for the demon to come back with seven of his friends.^v

But if the house is filled with the Spirit of God, the demons will not be able to return. If Jesus is on the throne, the demons cannot come rule in that house. Those who have given their lives to Jesus, who have repented and turned back to God, have filled their “house” – their body, their temple – with the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 6:19–20). Jesus reigns over their house; they dwell in the kingdom of God.^{vi} If we choose not to follow Jesus, if we decide we are atheistic or even agnostic, we may believe we rule our own life, that we aren’t submitted to anyone, that no one rules over our house. We are free to live however we want. But there are, in reality, only two options, two kingdoms. Your life is either ruled by Jesus or it is ruled by Satan. There is no neutral ground. This is spiritual warfare. We must give Jesus control of our mind and our heart so Satan (sin, evil, the world) cannot control them.

Q: What is the difference between a life ruled by Jesus and a life ruled by the world?

Q: How can you tell that someone is letting the Holy Spirit rule his/her life?

Q: In what areas of your life are you still trying to hold control? In what ways do you need to give up rule of your life to Jesus?

Q: What are some more subtle ways that Satan (or the world or evil) can rule your life, even if you’re not actually possessed by a demon? How can we stop evil thoughts from ruling our minds, and evil habits and actions from ruling in our bodies?

Matthew 12:46–50 [Read]

Talking Point 3: Those who do the will of God are the true family of Jesus.

Q: Why did Jesus identify those who do the will of God as His true family?

Q: In what ways are our Christian brothers and sisters our true family?

Early in His ministry, it wasn't only the religious leaders who doubted Jesus. The people of His home village of Nazareth didn't believe that the carpenter's son they knew could be the Messiah and have such miraculous powers and such wisdom (Matthew 13:55). John wrote that not even Jesus' own brothers believed in Him (John 7:5). Later, His mother, Mary, and His brothers would be among His disciples in the Upper Room on Pentecost (Acts 1:14) and would receive the Holy Spirit along with them. But at this point in His ministry, they still doubted Him.

We don't know exactly why they wanted to speak with Him that day. Maybe to warn Him that He was causing trouble. Maybe to ask Him to come back home and live a regular life with them. Maybe they were ashamed by His behavior. In Mark's version of this story, he wrote that Jesus' family came to take custody of Him, saying, "He is out of his mind" (Mark 3:21). In their culture, a family would try to save their collective honor by making an effort to conceal any relative's behavior that would bring public shame. In an honor/shame-based culture like theirs, the whole family lost honor if one of their family members was believed to be out of his mind and they didn't keep him under control.^{vii}

But Jesus surprised everyone by denying that His biological family had any special right to Him. This would have been shocking for anyone in their culture to say. In ancient Jewish culture, and even traditional Greek and Roman culture in that time, family was paramount. It was the most basic social structure, the center of a person's identity and honor. And it extended from the immediate family to the wider family, the tribe, the community and the nation. Being anti-family was considered dangerous and rebellious, not just to your family, but to the whole social structure.^{viii} Yet, Jesus had told His disciples a few chapters earlier that discipleship meant they must love Him more than their family (Matthew 10:37). He recognized the same thing for Himself. His allegiance was not to His biological family, tribe, or nation but to the kingdom of God. God was His Father, and the children of God were His brothers and sisters. Those who do the will of His Father, those who submit to God as their Father. His idea of family identity was completely different from the world around Him, and He expected those who chose to follow Him to redefine their identity, family and allegiance in the same way.

Those of us who are part of God's kingdom today, the Church, should understand what Jesus means. We have a unique bond with the body of Christ that we do not have with our biological family who are not believers. The Holy Spirit bonds us supernaturally in a way that cannot be described. We have the same mission, purpose, values, goals and identity. As much as we may love our biological family and our non-Christian friends, there are some things they will just never understand about us until they meet Jesus. There are ways we will never see eye-to-eye. In that sense, our Christian brothers and sisters are more our family than our biological family ever will be. Not just the people we know in our local church community, but all believers everywhere, across the world.

If you have ever been on a mission trip and met Christians from completely different cultures or gone to a conference or retreat where you connected with believers from other churches, you have had a taste of this. These people are our brothers and sisters because we share the same heavenly Father. And the same big brother in Jesus. And the same Holy Spirit dwells in us.

Q: How do you connect with your church family or other believers in ways that your non-Christian family and friends will never understand? Why do they feel like family?

Q: What does it mean that they are your family? How are you supposed to relate to them? How can you learn from one another and challenge one another to grow? What does it mean for unity, reconciliation and forgiveness?

Q: What difference does it make in your day-to-day life that you are part of a worldwide cross-cultural family of God?

Week 14: Matthew 12:22–50

Took

Main Point: Whoever does the will of the Father is Jesus' brother and sister.

The phrase, “practicing the presence of God,” was coined by a great man of God, Brother Lawrence, a Carmelite Monk who lived in the 1600s. This simple plan guides Christians in developing a constant reminder of the ever-abiding presence of God. Brother Lawrence suggests in his book, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, to use everyday actions, sights, sounds, etc. as “triggers” of God’s presence. Before leaving today, select a trigger that you’ll remember throughout the coming week which will serve as a reminder of God’s presence in Your life.

Some suggestions for triggers: When you see a purple car, whenever you hear a bird singing, when you use your blinker, when you smell something pleasant, etc. It should be something that you’ll either do or sense fairly regularly throughout your day. Every time your trigger goes off, take a few moments to be reminded of God’s presence. Worship Him; listen to His voice; think about your memory verse and say a quick prayer. Take time throughout this week to memorize Joshua 24:15: *Choose for yourselves today whom you will serve; as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.*

CHALLENGES

THINK: about your life in terms of good versus evil, the kingdom of God versus the kingdom of the world, evil, sin or Satan. You might even want to draw a chart, with a clear line between the two. In what ways is Satan, sin, evil or the world trying to rule your life? How can you, instead, give over control of your life to Jesus?

PRAY: for the strength to fight against evil in our own minds and hearts. That God would so fill you with His Spirit that there is no space for Satan or evil or sin to dwell. That you could put on the full armor of God each day to fight against the schemes of the Devil in your life.

ACT: Each morning this week, as you get dressed, imagine yourself putting on each piece of the armor of God – the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the boots of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit. Imagine yourself going into battle against sin and evil, both in your own heart and mind and in the world. Continue, throughout your day, to imagine yourself as a spiritual soldier on a spiritual battlefield, fighting on Jesus’ side for the kingdom of God. Come back next week ready to share whether envisioning yourself as a soldier made any difference in the way you lived, responded to things, or interacted with other people in the world.

Hook, Took & Editing by Alan Moore

ⁱ John P. Meier, *Matthew, New Testament Message 3* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1980).

ⁱⁱ Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing, 1999).

ⁱⁱⁱ Geza Vermes, *The Religion of Jesus the Jew* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1993).

^{iv} Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing, 1999).

^v Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971).

^{vi} Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971).

^{vii} Bruce J. Malina, *Windows on the World of Jesus: Time Travel to Ancient Judea* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1993).

^{viii} J. Duncan M. Derrett, *Jesus' Audience: The Social and Psychological Environment in Which He Worked* (New York, NY: Seabury Press, 1973).