

Focus Text

*"Then a demon-oppressed man who was blind and mute was brought to him, and he healed him, so that the man spoke and saw. And all the people were amazed, and said, "Can this be the Son of David?" But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons." Knowing 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 Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house. Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come." **(Matthew 12:22–32, ESV)***

1. Phenomenon of Power

*"Then a demon-oppressed man who was blind and mute was brought to him, and he healed him, so that the man spoke and saw. And all the people were amazed, and said, "Can this be the Son of David?" But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons." **(Matthew 12:22–24, ESV)***

Jesus continues to heal in secret, kind of, as a demon-possessed man is brought to him. Jesus heals the man without complication. However, it's clear Matthew wants to focus away from the man's healing and more on the growing opposition Jesus faces. The Pharisees, who are seeking to destroy Jesus, have continued their verbal opposition. Jesus's ability to heal and cast away the unclean spirits with ease has the crowds around him continuing their claim that this person is the "Son of David," aka the Messiah. The Pharisees present a counterargument that Jesus may instead be the son of the prince of demons. Instead of seeing the healing around them as a blessing of liberation, Jesus' opponents begin to attempt to sow fear in people's hearts about the power Jesus is using. They argue that Jesus is using black magic to heal people.

“Historically it is the first of a long series of Jewish testimonies that reject Jesus because of magic.⁵⁶ It deeply perverts what Jesus is about by claiming that precisely the Jesus who was far removed from any magic and who used his power to work miracles in the service of suffering humanity should act in the name of the devil! His opponents see at work in the figure of Jesus the devil himself, whose rule Jesus saw broken by the coming of the kingdom of God (cf. v. 28–29*)! Thus labeled, Jesus’ exorcisms evoke fear instead of liberating. His opponents say no to Jesus with the devil’s help, that is, with the help of the greatest possible “metaphysical” power. Now no more bridges can be built.”¹

2. Parable of Unity

“Knowing 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 Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.”

(Matthew 12:25–28, ESV)

This argument is illogical, and Jesus will offer a simple military image to refute this accusation. A king seeking to expand their kingdom would not attack and destroy their own lands and people, as such actions would diminish the kingdom rather than expand it. Imagine if you and another person are working on your house. While you are framing, installing drywall, and running new electrical lines upstairs, the second person is using a sledgehammer to knock down the walls you built downstairs. The house is not being built up; it's being dismantled. If Jesus were in league with the devil, then this effort would be ridiculous.

¹ 56 Justin Dial. 69.7. The Jewish references are collected in Joseph Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Macmillan, 1953) 18–28; Str-B 1.38–39, 84–85, 631. Therefore, healings in the name of Jesus (by Jewish Christians) were later strictly rejected (Str-B 1.36).

* 28 But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you.

29 Or how can one enter a strong man’s house and plunder his property, without first tying up the strong man? Then indeed the house can be plundered.

Matthew 12:28–29 (NRSV)

Luz, Ulrich. 2001. *Matthew: A Commentary*. Edited by Helmut Koester. *Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg.

Jesus also notes that if he works for the prince of demons, then other Jewish exorcists are likewise working for the demons. Jesus points out that their accusation implies all their countrymen who serve as exorcists are also with the demons.

Jesus concludes that this is ridiculous, and the only possible explanation is that the Kingdom of God has come through Jesus.

"Jesus responds with an analogy from civil warfare to the accusation that Satan was empowering him. Internal conflict within a country, town, or even family, if unchecked, will tear it apart (v. 25). "Ruined" is more literally laid waste, in the sense of becoming a desert or wilderness. Jesus concludes that because demonization promotes Satan's designs, Satan would not himself seek to cast out demons (v. 26). He would be undermining his own work. Moreover, Jesus is not the only exorcist in the area. Other Jews practiced exorcism as well. Without evaluating this state of affairs, Jesus points out that the logic of the charge against him condemns those making it. If Satan is the one who enables exorcisms, then other Jewish exorcists must also be devilish. Jesus' accusers judge their own "people" (literally, sons) by their accusations (v. 27)."²

3. Power to Bind

"Or how can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house. Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters." **(Matthew 12:29–30, ESV)**

To continue the analogy, Jesus leans into Isaiah 49 and the understanding that, to bring the Kingdom of God to bear, one must first bind the owner of the house. The bible asserts that Satan has been given dominion on the earth to roam about, causing chaos. Jesus, in casting out these unclean spirits, is binding the strong man, the devil, and then stealing from him, saving people from the grips of death and Hell. Jesus declares that he is stronger than the prince of demons and has bound the demons in their own house. Jesus then infers that he is looting from the devil and taking lost people from the kingdom of earth into the Kingdom of God. Jesus is the hound of heaven searching far and wide to save lost sinners and giving them eternal life. Don't forget to jot down another declaration that Jesus is the Messiah who has come to bring the Kingdom of God to earth.

² Blomberg, Craig. 1992. Matthew. Vol. 22. The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

“Jesus suggests that the devil is already bound; only then can one enter his house and liberate people who are ruled by him”³

“Can the prey be taken from the mighty, or the captives of a tyrant be rescued? For thus says the Lord: “Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken, and the prey of the tyrant be rescued, for I will contend with those who contend with you, and I will save your children.” **(Isaiah 49:24–25, ESV)**

4. Peril of Blasphemy

“Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.”

(Matthew 12:31–32, ESV)

The final point to this argument is known in Christianity as the “unforgivable sin.” Before moving forward with this challenging message from Jesus, God is the one who forgives sins, and this unforgivable sin lies with God alone. I agree with the New American Commentary, which states, “Believers should not go around telling others they have committed this sin.” We must approach this with care and caution, not wanting to cause undue alarm among the sisters and brothers of Christ.

The early church wrestled with two versions of this sin. One was a believer who rejected Jesus in open apostasy. The second was the rejection of Jesus' divinity by pagans and unbelievers. In Matthew, the Pharisees and their rejection of Jesus' divine works appear to be the focus. For me personally, the central argument seems to be the rejection of Jesus Christ as the divine Messiah who has come to save people. Methodism holds that apostasy, as found in Hebrews, is possible that one who professes Christ may openly reject Jesus, and there is no second source of salvation. As well, in John 14, Jesus makes it clear that the path to eternal life is only through himself. The sin, then, that seems most plausible is denying Jesus. If one comes to the end of their mortal life and rejects outright the saving grace found in Christ, we may say they have committed this unforgivable sin.

³ Luz, Ulrich. 2001. *Matthew: A Commentary*. Edited by Helmut Koester. *Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg.

Jesus is the one who sees the heart of a human, and we leave judgment to the Lord. Also, if you feel sorrow for your sin and recognize them as wrong and against God, then take heart, the Spirit is at work in you. We should see this warning as a call for urgency in evangelism, not a tool for fear-mongering.

"Probably blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is nothing more or less than the unrelenting rejection of his advances. Jesus' teaching thus parallels Acts 4:12. If one rejects the Spirit of God in Jesus, there is no one else in all the cosmos who can provide salvation. But we dare never label anyone as having committed this sin. Only God knows human hearts, and we would often make the wrong guess. Moreover, professing believers who fear they have committed the unforgivable sin demonstrate a concern for their spiritual welfare which by definition proves they have not committed it."⁴

Application

"Take Thou Authority."

During Ordination, a Bishop of the Church commands the ordinand to take Jesus' authority into the whole world. It's a ceremonial way of reminding pastors that God has called them into the mission field, and that should be done with boldness and love.

While you may not be called to preach every week, the lesson we learn today is that Jesus has bound the strongman "Satan," and we as His representatives are called to pronounce freedom from sin and death to the whole world! One of the pillars of our church is to share the good news of Jesus. There is no better news than the fact that Jesus Christ can save sinners from sin and death by His grace and not by religious works.

What is one way you can be more "bold" in your faith? Write it down and take Jesus' Authority to the World!

⁴ Blomberg, Craig. 1992. Matthew. Vol. 22. The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.