

Hello brothers, sisters and friends,

Well, as some you already noticed, I'm trying to dig back into the book of Matthew, as I make my way through the gospels. I personally love the book of Matthew because there is such richness and depth, and even more so than I've seen yet. But, I think the main thing about Matthew that really catches my attention is it's straight-forward approach - almost a gentle though blunt: 'this is how it is, you're welcome to take it or leave it' type approach. That's the quality of honesty that I like to communicate, so I guess that's why I spend so much time in it. I love how it's a pretty clear book for seeing Jesus, here on Earth, telling us who He is, who we really are (not who we think we are), and how to have a growing and continuing relationship with Him - including repenting and walking in obedience, and so on. So, picking up basically where we left off, I'm back to doing a semi-thorough run through Matthew, and highlighting the notable things that stand out for me and things that are so often overlooked. So, with all that said, here goes some highlights I've been meditating on in Matthew 12.

Okay, that was the briefest of overview, as I'm sure you noticed. It's so long yet so rich (even for an overview), because there is much truth in the text for us to at least notice. So, anyway, I had to split this overview into two parts. The first part is called:

'Part 1 - Conversations with hypocritical religious leaders'

Okay, so this chapter has a wide range of topics, unlike chapter 13, which has more of a similar theme and will likely take a little longer to glean from, which - btw, I'm really looking forward to talking about since I've been studying and analyzing at least a few of the parables in Matthew 13 for quite a few years, as well as bouncing my observations and parallel studies off of several for quite a few years too.

Anyway, Matthew 12. I hope you will allow me to briefly set the setting, so you can see some of the scenery and the main characters. Matthew 12 opens with Jesus teaching His disciples and the multitudes and having taught well enough to bring such conviction on the religious hypocrites of His day that they are now in full-attack mode: and in this chapter you will see them try to 'catch Him doing something wrong, but they only end up just giving Him an opportunity to prove that they had set up an unrighteous standard, completely different from God's righteous standard. Then, they try to 'trip Him up' in what He said (always a losing battle for them). And, then they try to outright slander Him - all while trying to do it so cleverly that they hope they appear righteous still... but, lying, deceiving and slandering Jesus (God in human flesh) only adds to their trouble and eternal consequences the more they do it.

"At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. And His disciples were hungry, and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, 'Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!' But He said to them, 'Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? Or have you not read in the

law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless? Yet I say to you that in this place there is One greater than the temple. But if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.'" (Matthew 12:1-8)

So, first stop, the Scribes and Pharisees, who are apparently following Him around and/or have a messenger or two (at least) trying to catch Jesus doing something 'wrong' - which is impossible, because: "**Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.**" (James 1:13) But, in their hearts, they were secretly trying to catch Jesus doing something wrong, because, they wickedly reasoned, if they could catch Jesus doing something wrong, then they would be able to keep doing the evil they had become accustomed to doing, while looking religious. Having said that, you would not believe how many of those who call themselves pastors are doing exactly that - all pastors need your careful watchful eye, because you are their accountability partners, whether they like it or not. And the things that your pastor(s) entertains himself with or allows in his house prove whether he is remaining faithful to his calling to be a godly pastor or not - what he does in secret and on his 'off hours', is who he really is. You need to watch him closely and pray that he gets caught and exposed if he has become apostate or a smooth-talking story-teller and false teacher. Keep him on track, and teach others to do the same - that is the quickest way to get our country back on track, and your help and prayers in this will be much appreciated! And, yes, btw, I need the accountability too - for I'm one of those who always wants to be on track, but I too need to hear rebukes and gentle correction when I'm wrong. :) So, yeah, keep us spiritual leaders accountable and being honest with you and God's Word, with gentleness and grace, and please keep praying that I keep learning. And if you see that I say/teach/explain something wrong or in a way that excuses sin, I hope you will email me - I love hearing from friends, when I'm right and/or wrong ~ :) Just trying to be open and honest. Thanks to those of you who do, and may God bless you with more wisdom in His Word according to your love for and obedience to what you know and are growing in understanding. :) ~ It encourages me greatly to see (and be a part of) a growing group of people who are coming out from this world, it's systems and entertainment, and reaching out to those who are lost and confused, and daily growing in how to be a more effective trainer of passionate, bold and genuine disciples of Christ. Thanks! :)

So, anyway, back to the text, the scribes and Pharisees thought they had something on Jesus - Jesus' disciples were breaking the Sabbath by picking (with their hands) some heads of wheat, rolling the wheat in their hands (to get rid of the husks and stems, etc) and then eating the wheat that they had 'prepared'. Any work was a violation of the Sabbath, so they thought, and they were judging Jesus to the finest detail (which was fine) but with an evil heart-motive to justify their hidden rebellion. And in their minds, they were sure they had just caught and could prove that Jesus' disciples were 'breaking the Sabbath' and what was worse yet is Jesus was allowing His disciples to do that. So, what they thought was 'catching' Jesus doing something

wrong, turned out to be an opportune time for Jesus to expose their hypocrisy, their lying, their twisting of Scripture, and the evil heart-motive behind it - corrupting God's ways to justify their own.

I love it how the Pharisees accuse Jesus, and He doesn't even bother with their petty judgments, but goes right to the core of the issue. They had turned the setup that God had established for the Jewish people of keeping the Sabbath - into a way to control the sheep - the people. And Jesus simply starts with a question of "**Have you not read...?**" and then quotes a passage that I'm assuming was either regular reading for them or was simply overlooked. I can't quite figure it out, but either way, they were supposed to be scholarly Bible students of the Old Testament, yet proved to be ignorant (apparently willfully so) on the simplest of details. Jesus makes 2 distinct cases that prove that God's system isn't to command us to keep all of the outward details and therefore be justified before Him, but to keep teaching our heart to desire to please Him. (those 2 examples are incredible, but I'll let you dig into them further yourself). Then, Jesus reminds them of a passage that was apparently so commonly said that it was easily recognized, only Jesus uses it to show that the scribes and Pharisees are clearly the ones violating it - and with nowhere to hide. "**But if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless.**" (Matthew 12:7)

Then, after proving that He was right and they had falsely accused them and exposing the evil of their hearts, He then makes a conclusion that is on-topic but literally stuns them: "**For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.**" (Matthew 12:8) ~ He is Lord, He is just not recognized as Lord, then or even in many places today. His statement reminds me so much of the picture of the Laodicean church age we find ourselves in today, (Rev. 3:20) where Jesus is outside the door of many lukewarm and entertainment, demonic smooth-talking psychology, and story-telling driven churches all around the globe - He's knocking from the outside. As He was then, so He still is - calling people out of the hypocritical facades of trying to look good and get away with as much as we can, rather than a whole-hearted sell-out to follow and serve and obey Christ and Christ, *alone*. For when the church adopts the world's practices and idolatry as okay and normal, they don't change God's mind, they only show Him out the door. Yet, Jesus does not and will not remain silent with His warnings - and neither should we. Where we see something that either directly violates the Word of God, or something that inspires and fuels hypocrisy, we do need to speak up, and in doing so, we will be helping/saving many others - if nothing else, than by exposing an apostate leader or a wolf in shepherd's clothing.

(this short overview continues in the next note titled: 'Part 2 - Traps, Good Answers and Solid Teaching')

See you in part 2 :) ~ your brother/friend, SH