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Matthew 12:22 - 12:28



Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg discusses Matthew 12:22-28 where Jewish leaders questioned the source of Jesus' power, suggesting he was operating under the power of Satan. However, there were undeniable supernatural acts occurring that suggested Jesus was the Messiah. Gregg notes that Jesus did not necessarily know everything, as he was limited in his human form. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit operates through the church today. The speaker suggests that while there are people who are enemies of one another, it is important to apply critical thinking and come to our conclusion.

Transcript

Let's continue now our study in the life of Jesus, beginning at Matthew 12 and verse 22. Now last time, I read a lengthy passage, but we only really discussed one of the verses in that passage, and we want to continue looking at that passage and go further this time. The passage is that found in Matthew 12, beginning at verse 22, where it says of him, Then one was brought to him, who was demon-possessed, blind and mute.

And he healed him, so that the blind and the mute man both spoke and saw. And all the multitudes were amazed and said, Could this be the son of David? But when the Pharisees heard that, they said, This fellow does not cast out demons, except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons. But Jesus knew their thoughts, and he said to them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not 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 Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges. But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you.

Or else 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? He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters abroad. This is the passage we read last time, and last time we got no further than to discuss the opening verse, and

that is where a demon-possessed man who is blind and mute was cured by the casting out of a demon. Now, when this phenomenon occurred, of course, a man who had been blind was now able to see.

A man who had not been able to talk was now able to speak. There were a lot of witnesses to this. The things Jesus did were not done in a corner.

They were publicly done, and the witnesses were quite impressed, as a matter of fact. It says, and all the multitude were amazed and said, Could this be the son of David? Now, the term son of David does not simply mean someone who is descended from David. There were many people who were descended from David.

David had about eight wives or more, a lot of kids, and this was now a thousand years after the time of David. So, there must have been many, many, many hundreds of people who could claim that their ancestors had been descended from David. But, when they said, Could this be the son of David? They meant specifically the Messiah.

The son of David was a term that was applied to the Messiah because in 2 Samuel chapter 7, God had promised David that the Messiah would be one of his offspring. And ever since that time, one of the titles for the Messiah among the Jews was the son of David. So, when the people saw Jesus doing these miracles, they thought, Well, this could be the Messiah.

And they said, Could this be the son of David? Now, when the Pharisees heard that, they said, No, this fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons. Now, we can see here that the Pharisees were alarmed to hear the crowds suggesting the possibility that Jesus was the Messiah. That's what bothered them.

That's why they suggested this alternative explanation. You see, no one could deny that Jesus had done something remarkable. It's interesting that many modern skeptical scholars will suggest that Jesus was an ordinary peasant philosopher who never did anything really remarkable, but a great number of legends grew up around him.

And, eventually, people started to talk about him as if he was God. And, eventually, they started making up stories of him doing miracles and so on and so forth. This is how modern skeptics often try to reconstruct the life of Jesus.

However, the enemies of Jesus in his own day and in the days of the apostles never really denied that Jesus did supernatural things. Even the Talmud, which is the Jewish book that originated around the time of Christ, well, it was even before the time of Christ, it was oral traditions of the Jews. It was a couple centuries later it was written down.

But the Talmud is not friendly toward Jesus at all because it represents the beliefs of the Jewish rabbis. And the rabbis never have been believers in Christ. That is, in Jesus.

And the Talmud speaks of Jesus frequently, but it refers to him as a sorcerer who tricked the people with the marvelous works. So, even the Jewish Talmud, which is antagonistic toward Christ, does not deny that Jesus did supernatural things. No one who knew the facts would deny that.

Because even his enemies found it necessary to explain the problematic fact that Jesus was doing supernatural things, casting out demons. Now, interestingly, two possibilities exist. If something supernatural is taking place, then it is either coming from God or from the enemy of God.

You see, there's really only two sides to the supernatural realm. There's those that are ranked on the side of God, God himself and his angels, and of course those people that side with him. And then on the other hand, there's those who are siding with the enemy of God, which is Satan.

Now, Jesus himself said that in the passage we just read. He said, whoever is not with me is against me. There's really only two sides that one can take.

You can't be neutral. In the spiritual universe, there are only those who side with God and wholly adore and worship and obey him. Or, the alternative is those who have rebelled against God and are opposed to him and hostile toward him.

That's true, by the way, among human beings as well. But in the spirit realm, it is true. And when you see something supernatural occur, then there's one of two explanations that must accrue.

One is God is doing a marvelous thing. The other is the devil is doing this supernatural thing to deceive people. Now, the Jews of Jesus' time, the Jewish leaders, the Pharisees, they decided that the crowds were naive or at least dangerously loyal to Jesus because the crowds were concluding that the supernatural thing that Jesus did was coming from God and was perhaps an evidence that he was the Messiah.

Of course, that's what Christians today believe. The Pharisees, however, argued that this was indeed a supernatural thing, but it was not coming from God. It was coming from the enemy of God.

He was doing this by the power of Beelzebub, the prince of the demons. And this, of course, became the official position of the Jews later on, the rabbis, and that's why that very opinion is reflected in the Talmud. It says that Jesus was a sorcerer and did these things by the power of the devil.

So you've had two opinions about the origins of Jesus' supernatural activities from the very beginning. Those who believed in him believe he operated in the power of God. Those who opposed him believed he operated in the power of Satan.

It's interesting, there was not a third group who just denied that he did supernatural things. That denial was not a possibility. It was not open to them.

Now, the Pharisees, as far as we know, made this comment, not because they had really good reasons to believe he was from the devil, but because they were terrified at the prospect that the crowds might hail him as the Messiah. And when they were saying, could this be the son of David? Could this be the Messiah? The Pharisees found themselves desperately trying to do anything to discredit him and to dispel the notion that he might be the Messiah. Now, of course, to do so, they had to find some other way of explaining the supernatural deeds that were in fact pointing to the fact that he was the Messiah.

And so they came up with the only alternative that made sense to them, and that was that he was doing it by the power of Beelzebub, the prince of demons. Now, the name Beelzebub is a variation on a name of a deity of the pagans in the Old Testament named Beelzebul. Beelzebul means something like exalted Lord.

I forget the exact meaning of the Hebrew expression. But the Jews, when they spoke of this pagan deity, they spoke of it with great contempt. And they changed the name of Beelzebul to the name Beelzebub.

And that slight change of the second part of the word turned the meaning of the word to Lord of the Flies. And so a name that the pagans revered as a pagan deity, the Jews changed the name in order to name him the Lord of the Flies to show their contempt of him. Well, this was actually an idol, a pagan idol in the Old Testament times, Beelzebul.

And I guess in the thinking of the rabbis, they had developed their theology to link this name to the prince of the demons. Now, Jesus does not deny that the demons have a prince. In fact, he identifies the prince of the demons as Satan.

Because he said, if Satan is casting out Satan, then his kingdom will stand. Now, that very statement, if Satan is casting out Satan, is his way of responding to them saying Beelzebub was casting out demons. Both Beelzebub and the demons were considered to be part of Satan's activity.

They were Satan's minions. And it's probable that he was even equating the name Beelzebub with Satan himself. Now, the point here is, the reference to Jesus casting out demons by Satan was the way that the enemies of Christ tried to link Jesus with the side of evil.

And yet anyone could see that the things Jesus was doing were not evil things. He was not blaspheming God. He was not going out doing the works of the devil.

He was doing the very works of God. The very same kinds of things that the prophets of God, like Elijah and Elisha and Moses, had done in the Old Testament. There were

miracle workers in the Old Testament.

And the works they did were beneficial miracles. They were miracles that helped people, alleviated suffering and so forth. And these were just the characteristic things that God did when he acted supernaturally through his prophets in the Old Testament.

And now, here, these same things were being done by Jesus. And even greater things were now being done by Jesus. Which gave the Pharisees no excuse for mistaking the origin of this miraculous activity.

Now, Jesus knew their thoughts, it says in verse 25. And to say that Jesus knew their thoughts, many Christians say, well, of course he knew their thoughts. He knew everything, didn't he? He knew every thought of every person.

Well, that's not necessarily taught in the Scriptures. The Bible teaches that Jesus, when he came to earth, did not operate in all of his divine powers. Because he had to operate, it seems to me, as a man.

In order to become a real man, he had to be, for example, capable of dying. Well, God can't die. But Jesus did.

Jesus died and he had to die. That was part of his mission. And therefore, in order to become a man and fulfill his mission, he had to lay aside some of his divine privileges.

This is what I believe. There are some Christians who believe otherwise. In Philippians chapter 2, it speaks of Jesus prior to coming to earth, that he existed in the form of God.

But he laid aside his privileges and came to earth as a man, took on the form of a servant. Now, it seems to me that some of the divine privileges that Jesus laid aside were his omniscience, his omnipotence, and his omnipresence. Omnipresence means being everywhere at once.

God is everywhere at once, but when Jesus was on earth, he was not everywhere at once. He was not. He even said so.

He said that he was not there when Lazarus died. He said to his disciples, our friend Lazarus is dead, and for your sakes, I'm glad I wasn't there. So, Jesus was not omnipresent.

He wasn't everywhere at once when he was on earth, though God is. And I believe Jesus was, before his incarnation, before he came to earth in the form of a man, Jesus was omnipresent. But that's one of his divine privileges that he put aside in order to become a man.

Another of those divine privileges I believe he put aside to become a man was omniscience, which is knowing all things. Now, the reason I believe that Jesus didn't

know all things is because he said he didn't know all things. Now, we know that God does.

God is omniscient. But on one occasion, in Matthew 24, Jesus was asked about the time of his coming, and he said, well, no man knows the day or the hour, nor the angels of heaven, nor even the sun, meaning himself. I don't even know, he says.

Only my father knows that. Well, if there's something that the father knows but Jesus didn't know, that would mean Jesus was not omniscient. He was not omniscient on earth.

But the next thing that comes to people's minds usually when someone says this is, well, then how did Jesus know everything that he knew? I mean, he could prophesy the future. He could know what people were thinking. He could see Nathanael under the fig tree before he ever really came within view of him.

How did Jesus do all those things? Well, Jesus did all those things the same way the apostles did, or the same way the prophets did in the Old Testament. Many of the prophets in the Old Testament not only told the future, but they saw things in vision that were happening far away from them. Ezekiel saw when he was in Babylon, he saw things that were taking place in the temple in Jerusalem.

Elisha saw his servant Gehazi running out to meet Naaman the Syrian. And although this was in the spirit, we'd call this a vision. We might call it a word of knowledge, a gift of the Holy Spirit, Paul mentions.

Certainly there was the gift of prophecy. There are ways in which the Holy Spirit revealed to men, even before Jesus came, things they could not possibly naturally know. These were prophetic gifts.

Likewise, the apostles had some of this. When Peter knew that Ananias and Sapphira were lying about the amount they sold their property for, this was a supernatural revelation to him. Well, these are the gifts of the Holy Spirit in operation.

The Bible indicates that when Jesus was on earth, he did many supernatural things, but he did them through the gifts of the Holy Spirit. What Jesus did was the working of the Holy Spirit through him. He came to earth handicapped as a human being.

I believe Jesus came to earth having laid aside his power of omniscience, because, as pointed out, Jesus pointed out that he didn't know the day of his coming, though his father knew. That very much proves he wasn't omniscient, because if you're omniscient, there won't be something you don't know. On the other hand, when we do find Jesus knowing things that he would not naturally know, it is the same gift of the Holy Spirit operating in Christ that operated in the apostles and even seemingly in some of the prophets before the time of Christ.

Now, that doesn't mean that Jesus was in some sense equal to those people. He was in all points superior. But I'm saying that when Jesus did supernatural things or knew things in a supernatural way, it was the work of the Holy Spirit.

How do I know this? Well, for one thing, he said so. A little later in this same passage that we're reading, he said in verse 28, If I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is overtaken. Jesus acknowledged that his supernatural activity was through the Spirit of God.

He didn't say, I do this because I am God. Now, by the way, I want you to understand, I do believe Jesus is God. I believe in the deity of Christ.

But it was not acting as God that he did these things. He was not operating in his own power as God. He was a human being.

He was God, having taken on a human form, laying aside his privileges in order to live under genuine handicaps like we do, so he could be tempted in all points as we are. By the way, God can't be tempted, but Jesus was tempted, so that he could become weary. God doesn't ever become weary, but Jesus did.

So that he could die. God doesn't die, but Jesus did. There are many things that in human nature Jesus was limited in ways that he was not limited before he became a human being.

And one of those ways, I believe, is in terms of his omniscience. We can deduce this, of course, even from what it says of him in his childhood. In Luke chapter 2, the very last verse says that Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and favor of God and man.

Well, if he, as a child, increased in wisdom, then he could not have had all wisdom at the outset, or else you'd have no place to increase. You see, Jesus lived under human handicaps, but when he did no things supernaturally, or do things supernaturally, it was through the Spirit of God. And we find that the apostles, who operated through the same Spirit, did virtually all the same kinds of supernatural things Jesus did.

And by the way, there are people who do them today, too. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are for the church. They are a continuation of the same ministry that the Holy Spirit was doing through Jesus when he was here.

That same Holy Spirit operates through the body of Jesus today, which is his church. Anyway, Jesus, on this occasion, apparently had what we would probably call a word of knowledge or a prophetic insight into what these people were thinking, because it doesn't say that he heard them speak. The Pharisees were apparently speaking behind his back, saying he's doing these things by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons.

But Jesus knew their thoughts, and he said to them, Every kingdom divided against itself

is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges.

But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. Now, Jesus, I think, is not necessarily saying that Satan can never be divided against himself. It may sound like he's saying that, but I don't know that that is what he's trying to say.

Because, after all, Satan's people often are very much divided against each other. And people who are under the power of Satan can very much be opposed and hostile toward other people who are under the power of Satan. There's many people who are enemies of each other.

I mean, Pilate and Herod were enemies of each other and divided against each other, even though they were both Satan's men and not God's men. And because of this, I don't think that Jesus is saying that Satan will never be schizophrenic, or that his kingdom or those in it will never be divided. They are.

But what he is saying is this. It would not be in Satan's interest to supernaturally oppose Satan's own power. Here we have demons being cast out, and some people are saying maybe the prince of demons is casting them out.

Well, why would he do that? If he is going to employ his own supernatural power, that is, Satan, if Satan is going to employ his own supernatural power to undermine his own supernatural activity, this would be not in his best interest, and it would certainly not be the best explanation of what Jesus is doing. He said, rather, if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, which is a much more reasonable theory, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. And by this he means that in casting out demons, he was demonstrating that a new authority had broken in.

Now, he's going to give the example of breaking into a strongman's house, binding him and spoiling his goods. I won't be able to comment on that today because we'll run out of time before I can. But the point he's making here, we'll do this next time, the point Jesus is making is that there is another kingdom that is in conflict with Satan's kingdom.

It is not a case where Satan is the only one acting, and the one who's possessing the people is Satan, and the one who's casting out the demons is Satan, too. It's rather that there are two kingdoms in conflict. And the fact that he says, I have come, and I'm casting out demons by the Spirit of God, shows that another kingdom has invaded.

Satan's kingdom has been here already, but God's kingdom has broken in. The kingdom of God has overtaken you. Now, in the course of this discussion, Jesus points out that the

casting out of demons is even something that some of the Jews did.

Jesus was not the first person to cast out demons. There were Jewish exorcists, and he mentions this. He says, by whom do your sons cast them out if I'm doing it by the power of Beelzebub? What he's saying is, if the only explanation you can think of for my supernatural activity of casting out demons is that it must be the devil doing it, then do you apply the same conclusion when your own exorcists cast out demons? Are they then necessarily doing it by the power of Beelzebub, too? Obviously, he does not expect them to acknowledge this.

And therefore, he says, therefore, they shall be your judges. If you think that this can only be done by the power of the devil, then these people who are on your side will have to come under the same condemnation, and they'll criticize you for coming up with that conclusion. We'll talk more about what it means to recognize the kingdom of God breaking in, and how the casting out of demons was a demonstration of that when we come back to this passage next time.

But for now, we've run out of time. Tune in again next time. We'll see you then.