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Matthew 12:33 - 12:37



Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

In this discussion, Steve Gregg delves into the teachings of Jesus in Matthew 12:33-37. He highlights how Jesus' words about good and evil treasure bringing forth good and evil deeds align with other teachings in the Bible. Gregg emphasizes the importance of understanding that one's words and deeds reflect the condition of their heart, and that these will be the ultimate evidence of one's true character. Through his teaching, Gregg encourages us to be mindful of our thoughts, words, and actions, and to seek to live according to God's will.

Transcript

Today we're turning to Matthew chapter 12, and beginning reading at verse 33. Jesus has been speaking in the previous verses, and he is continuing to speak. The setting is that same setting that prevailed at the beginning of the chapter.

This is the aftermath of a criticism that the Pharisees raised against Jesus. When he had cast demons out of a man, they said it was done by the power of Beelzebub. We've spent several sessions looking at the various things that Jesus said after this accusation was leveled against him.

Among the things he said was this, in Matthew 12, 33, 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. Brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

A good man, out of the good treasure of his heart, speaks forth good things. And an evil man, out of the evil treasure, brings forth evil things. But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment.

For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned. Now, this paragraph follows immediately after Jesus' statements about those who will have no forgiveness in this age or in the age to come. He talked about those who speak a word against the Spirit of God, those who blaspheme the Holy Spirit.

Now, obviously speaking a word, blaspheming, these are verbal sins. These have to do with things you say. And he said such people will have no forgiveness.

Now, in our last session we looked at that enigmatic portion of Scripture where Jesus talked about those who have no forgiveness. And I suggested that my understanding is that Jesus is not identifying here some unique sin that stands above all sins. That once you commit that particular sin, God simply won't forgive you.

Even if you repent, he won't forgive you because it's just too offensive. And you've gone beyond the pale by committing that one sin. That's how many people understand Jesus' teaching, but I think it's a little different than that.

I think what Jesus is saying is there comes a point in some people's lives that their hearts are so hardened against truth and so antagonistic against God and against all that is good that they could do anything without compunction. They'd feel no problem in their conscience even calling God the Holy Spirit, calling him the devil. And those who can do such things will never have forgiveness.

Not because they've suddenly said some unique words which God doesn't approve of so much so that he'll never forgive them even if they repent. But they'll never have forgiveness for the simple reason that their hearts are so far hardened that repentance is something they will never do. They don't have the softness of heart anymore that leads a person to feel conviction of sin and to repent.

And therefore, of course, they won't ever be forgiven because they'll never repent and for no other reason than that. Now, in other words, I was saying when we talked about that passage that the sin for which Jesus is, of which he is speaking, that people will never be forgiven of is not so much just a sin of saying the wrong words. It is more a sin of the heart.

It is that the words that are evil are coming from an evil heart. And it's the condition of the heart that brings a person into the condition of beyond repentance rather than that they spoke a particular set of words. And now this seems confirmed by what Jesus says next.

He talks about words coming from the heart. And every idle word a man speaks, he's going to have to give account for it. Why? Because God cares what's in the heart and that's the best gauge of what's in the heart.

The barometer of the heart's condition is observed in the speech. And that's what he is saying. Now, of course, there are times when our words do not reflect what's in our heart.

For example, he even gives examples of Pharisees. He says, how can you being evil speak good things? Now, they did. Sometimes the Pharisees would speak good things,

but they were evil.

Now, you see, what happens here is that people can fake it. People with an evil heart, people who hate you can speak in a kind way to you. People who have no religious fervor can fake religious fervor in what they say.

They can praise God and sing the songs and do all those things. It is possible to fake goodness in your speech even when you are evil. But it is not possible to consistently speak good things if you're evil because your unguarded speech will reveal what's in your heart.

And Jesus is saying there are unguarded moments where what we say is a pure example of what's going on in our hearts. There are times where it isn't. There are times when the Pharisees, though they're evil, are saying good things.

And they're pretending to be good people. But there are moments when the idle words, the unguarded words, what some translations call the careless words, where those come out and expose what's really in the heart. Now, he's referring here, of course, in the immediate context to this lie that the Pharisees told, that he was casting out demons by Beelzebub.

He's saying this is a good example of an unguarded word that exposes what's in the heart. And because of what the heart has in it, in this particular case, these people are too far gone to hope ever to repent and be saved. Now, let me look at the actual words Jesus spoke.

I've just summarized sort of what the paragraph is saying. He starts by saying, Now, this is not the first time we've encountered Jesus saying that a tree is known by its fruit. He said it in Matthew chapter 7 also in the closing portion of the Sermon on the Mount.

He's talking about false prophets. And he says in Matthew 7, 15, Now, that statement, Matthew 7, 20, Now, when we talk about knowing a false prophet by his fruit, we who are Christians may be inclined to interpret that in terms of the fruit of the Spirit. Although Jesus and his disciples had not read the book of Galatians, because Paul who wrote it was not yet converted and the book was not written.

And therefore, there'd be no reason why the disciples would immediately in their mind, when Jesus said you'll know a tree by its fruit, they wouldn't think, ah, he means the fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, gentleness, meekness, self-control, etc., etc. No, that's not the association they would make. All that they're understanding him to mean is that just as a tree from its very nature produces evidence of what kind of tree it is and whether it's a good tree or not by the fruit that it produces.

So there is something in man which comes forth and demonstrates like fruit on a tree does to the tree itself. There is something in a man that exposes what kind of a man he

is. Just like the presence of apples on a tree proves that that's an apple tree.

And the presence of good apples proves that it's a good apple tree. Or the production of little shriveled undersized apples proves it's an unhealthy apple tree. Just as you can tell much about the nature and the quality and the character of a tree by the fruit that it produces, so there is some measure in man, some visible thing in human nature that shows you what's really the condition and quality of that person.

Now, in a different connection, Jesus might have something else in mind as the measure, but here what he tells, the measure of a person's inward quality is seen in his speech, in what he says. And the tree and the fruit then refer to the man and his words. When Jesus said, 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.

Brute of vipers, how can you being evil speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. What he's saying is just as out of the abundance of the sap and the nature of the tree, the fruit is produced, so out of the abundance of what's in the inward nature of the man in his heart, his mouth speaks. What comes out of his mouth is like the fruit that exhibits what's inside.

The tree is known by its fruit, the man is known by what he says, by his words. Now, it's interesting because he says brute of vipers, which means generation of snakes, deadly snakes at that, how can you being evil speak good things? He's saying, now you seem to be giving the lie to the general maxim. The general maxim is a tree is known by its fruit.

But here you are a bad tree, you're evil, but you're speaking good things, like you have good fruit on your branches. It's an anomaly. You who are evil, it's out of character for you to speak good things.

That's why he says either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad. What he's saying is if you're going to be producing good fruit, just be a good tree. If you're going to be a bad tree, then produce bad fruit too.

Meaning this, don't be a hypocrite. Don't be a wicked person and pretending to be a righteous person by what you speak. Don't use your Christian jargon and say praise the Lord and sing the Christian songs when in fact your heart is evil.

Bring your speech into line with who you really are and don't try to fool people. That's what he's saying. Now he says, out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks, which indicates that one of the purest indicators of what's in the heart can be seen in what is spoken.

Though as I said a moment ago, people can speak. And even in this context, Jesus points out, it is possible, although it is not really possible for a literal tree to produce fruit that's out of character with itself, yet it is possible for a man to produce fruit that's out of

character for himself, at least temporarily. It is possible for a man who's evil to speak good things and therefore to deceive by it.

But that does not change the general principle that what people speak generally reveals what they are and that what their heart is full of. That's what he means by out of the abundance of the heart. When the heart is abundantly full of some trait or some issue, some concern, that is what's going to be spoken of.

You can easily tell what a person really loves by simply listening to him talk. You may hear a man singing on Sunday morning that he loves God above all things. But if you listen to him talk during the weekend, all he really chooses to talk about is sports or his money or some other thing, and he never really talks about the things of God, then it seems to me that what's pouring out of his mouth is what his heart is full of.

He may profess to be a lover of God when he's among Christians in a Christian meeting, but what he talks about most is what he loves the most. It's what's on his mind the most. And the things he says and the attitudes toward things that he exhibits in his speech, the sarcasm in his remarks, the things he chooses to mock, the things he chooses to praise, these things exhibit what he loves and what he hates.

And you can tell more about a man by his flow of speech out of his mouth, pouring out of his heart, than you can by his occasional utterances that are spoken in a way that's calculated to look good or whatever. Now, he says, a good man, verse 35, out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things. An evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things.

Again, he's speaking about a man's speech, that his heart is like a treasure chest. It's like a reservoir. And in this reservoir, there's a whole collection of values and concerns and preferences and attitudes and beliefs.

And whatever he may pretend to be at certain times, what really pours out of his mouth most of the time is going to tell you far more about what is in this reservoir. If a man loves sports, he's going to talk about sports. If he loves cars, he's going to talk about cars.

If he loves sex, he's going to talk about sex. If he loves money, he's going to talk about money. If he loves Jesus, he's going to talk about Jesus.

If he loves righteousness, he's going to talk about righteousness. If he loves entertainment, he's going to talk about entertainment. His heart and what he loves is a reservoir full of things.

And those things pour out. If he's a good man, then his heart is full of good things. He loves goodness, he loves righteousness, he loves God, he loves his fellow man.

And it says a good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things. That means when he speaks, he will speak consistently with his love for God and for man because that's what's in his heart. He will speak lovingly.

He will speak reverently. You will not find a man who is truly godly telling a dirty joke. Now, you may find a man who behaves godly very often but he tells a dirty joke once in a while.

That doesn't mean he's a good man. What he finds humorous, what he finds enjoyable to talk about, what he wants people to learn about from him will reflect where he's really at. And a man who speaks, you know, tells a dirty joke shows that even if he has some religious interest in him, he also loves ribaldry, he loves evil, at least at some level.

But a man whose heart is full of righteousness and goodness and love, that person's speech will show that. You know, one of the areas that this is especially true of is in the area of pride and humility. A proud man is often recognized by all of his boasting and talking about himself all the time.

Although a proud man can also pretend to be humble because, of course, at least in Christian circles and in many others, a man who appears to be humble is respected for his humility. And a proud man may recognize that fact and realize that people will be impressed with him more if he speaks humbly and demeaningly of himself. But the fact of the matter is true humility won't be thinking a great deal about oneself at all.

And a person who speaks a great deal to depreciate himself in a seeming humility is still apparently thinking a great deal about himself because it's out of the abundance of his heart. If he speaks a great deal about himself, then he must be thinking a great deal about himself. He must have great concern in his heart about himself.

And there can be an expression of pride in a false humility. But if a person really is self-depreciating and really thinks himself not particularly important or not particularly significant or not particularly worthy of attention, that would be true humility. And that person will not be likely to talk about himself much because he's not really thinking that he's all that interesting.

Why should anyone be interested in hearing about him? And so what's in the heart can be masked and disguised at times. But what profusely comes from the heart, especially at unguarded moments, cannot hide what is in the heart. And Jesus said in verse 36, But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment.

For by your words you will be justified and by your words you will be condemned. On the day of judgment, God won't have to bring out an x-ray machine to expose your heart and to convince you and everyone else that you really are who he knows you to be. I mean, if

God declares you to be a sinner and wicked and an enemy of God and condemns you to hell, or if he justifies you and says you are truly a sincere believer, you are one who has truly repented of your sin and turned to Christ and followed him in sincerity.

I mean, he doesn't have to do a dissection of your heart to find out what's in there. All he has to do is run the tape. All he has to do is go over again the things that you said.

And it's not as if you're being judged on something other than your heart's condition. It's just that what you said tells what your heart's condition is. It makes it unmistakable.

Every idle word a man will speak, he'll have to give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you'll be justified and by your words you'll be condemned. Your words will expose what's in your heart.

It makes it very easy to recognize, as it were, the sheep from the goats. Now, what does he mean every idle word a man speaks, he'll give account of it in the day of judgment? Well, to say you have to give account of your words doesn't mean that you'll necessarily be condemned for them. To give account just means you have to answer for them.

If your words are not bad, then you'll be justified. By your words you'll be justified and by your words you'll be condemned. To say you have to give account of every idle word doesn't mean that an idle word is a bad word.

Idle words and bad words are not the same thing. An idle word, as the King James Version uses it, can be translated as a careless word, or as I said earlier, an unguarded word. In their guarded speech, people may pretend to be one thing.

But when they think no one's paying attention, or when something just comes out as an ejaculation out of their mouth, without them thinking beforehand, without a forethought, that is going to be an unguarded word. That's an idle word. And what comes out at such times will be the true demonstration of what's in the heart.

And therefore it is those careless words that will be called up for consideration on the day of judgment. Those ones that are the true expression of what's in the heart. Because we'll be judged, of course, by whether our hearts are the Lord's or not.

Whether we really have believed in our hearts. Remember it says that. If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you'll be saved.

Well, believing in your heart. It's one thing to say you believe something, but what's really in your heart is what's going to be determined of your salvation or not in the day of judgment. And the things you speak, if they exhibit the evidence of true faith in Christ and true devotion and surrender and trust in Him, then those things will be the things that justify you.

Of course, what that really amounts to is that you speak in such a way as to seek to please Him whom you believe to be the Lord and Savior. And that faith calls forth a quality of speech and behavior that is consistently glorifying to God and pleasing to Him. Now, you might say, well, I've spoken a lot of things, even though I'm a Christian now.

A lot of things I said before, I don't want to have to give account of them on the day of judgment. But Jesus said, every idle word a man speaks, I have to give account on the day of judgment. Does that mean that on the day of judgment, I'm going to have to give account for everything I've said even before I was a Christian? The answer is no, because the day of judgment comes whenever you bring that sin to judgment.

When you became a Christian, you repented of your past sins. As it were, that was the day of judgment for those sins. You judged them to be wrong.

That's what repentance means. You condemn that behavior. You condemn your past.

You bring it to the cross, and it is judged there. But every time you sin, you need to confess your sins. You need to repent.

You need to bring those things to judgment, because I believe that whatever sins are not repented of have not been brought to judgment, and they will be brought up on the day of judgment. The only way we can prevent something we do from being brought up on the day of judgment is to bring it to judgment now, in advance, through repentance. Paul said this in 1 Corinthians 11, in around verse 30 or so.

He said, if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we're chastened by the Lord that we might not be condemned with the world. We can judge ourselves or wait for God to judge us about the things.

Judging ourselves means we repent. We own our sins as wicked and call them wicked and repent of them, and we bring them to judgment. If we do that, then it will not be necessary for God to bring them to judgment later.

If we judge ourselves, we will not be judged.