



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Gospel According to St. Matthew

Chapter 12

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Introduction

Chapter Main Points:

- The Pharisees take counsel against Jesus seeking to destroy Him
- Jesus and the Sabbath day
- The blasphemy of the Holy Spirit
- The true family of God



Introduction

In this chapter, we have

- I. Christ's clearing of the law of the fourth commandment concerning the Sabbath-day, 12:1-13
2. The prudence, humility, and self-denial of our Lord Jesus in working His miracles, 12:14-21
3. Pharisees blasphemous accusations against the Spirit, 12:22-37
4. The scribes and Pharisees' challenge to show them a sign from heaven and Christ's reply 12:38-45
5. Christ's judgment about His kindred and relations, Matthew 12:46-50

Jesus Is Lord of the Sabbath (12:1-8)



- The account contained in these verses is also recorded in Mark 2:23-28, and Luke 6:1-5
- The disciples were hungry not as one may be before his regular meals; but evidently from shortness of provisions: for Jesus defends their plucking the corn-ears and eating them on the plea of necessity
- Some of the sect were in attendance on the watch for a ground of accusation

Jesus Is Lord of the Sabbath (12:1-8)



- It was not unlawful for the hungry to pick and eat some grain from a farmer's field while traveling (Deut 23:26)
- The problem as the Pharisees saw it was that Jesus and His disciples were in violation of the prohibition against working on the Sabbath (Ex 20:8-11; 34:21; 35:1-3; Deut 5:12-15)
- The Pharisees did not quarrel with them for taking another man's corn, but for doing it on the Sabbath day

Jesus Is Lord of the Sabbath (12:1-8)



- The Pharisees were strict adherers to the Law and saw Jesus' actions as a violation of the prohibition against doing a "work" on the Sabbath (Ex 34:21)
- The Lord answers them by citing the case of David, who, under necessity, took, ate, and gave to his followers the show bread from the table in the Holy Place of the Sanctuary which it was lawful for priests only to eat 1 Samuel 21:2-7
- No example could be more strong than this
- The man after God's own heart, of whom the Jews ever boasted, when suffering in God's cause and straitened for provisions, asked and obtained from the high priest what, according to the law, was illegal for anyone except the priests to touch

Jesus Is Lord of the Sabbath (12:1-8)



- In the second example Jesus points out that the priests at the Temple violate the letter of the Law by working on the Sabbath serving God in the Temple, but the necessity of their ministry outweighs the violation
- The double offerings required on the Sabbath day, Numbers 28:9 could not be presented, and the new-baked showbread (Leviticus 24:5, 1 Chronicles 9:32) could not be prepared and presented every Sabbath morning, without a good deal of servile work on the part of the priests; not to speak of circumcision, which, when the child's eighth day happened to fall on a Sabbath, had to be performed by the priests

Jesus Is Lord of the Sabbath (12:1-8)



- If priests in the service of the temple can break the letter of the law and be blameless, how much more can the disciples of Him who is the Lord of the temple do so in His service and by His authority?
- Jesus' disciples were hungry and He allowed them to eat on the Sabbath so that they might continue their ministry in proclaiming the coming of the Kingdom
- The Jews esteemed nothing greater than the Temple, except that God who was worshipped in it
- Christ, by asserting He was greater than the Temple, asserts that He was God

Jesus Is Lord of the Sabbath (12:1-8)



- They ought to have known, for they professed to be interpreters of the law
- This is the second time St. Matthew quoted from Hosea 6:6, Matthew 9:13
- The quote from Hosea speaks of God's desire for the life of the humble and repentant offerer that was symbolized in the sacrifice of the animal
- It shows that all our forms, rites and ceremonies are worthless before God unless we have kind and merciful hearts
- It is the spirit of the Law and not the letter of the Law that matters

Jesus Is Lord of the Sabbath (12:1-8)



- He does not, then, abolish it, but has the right to make any change in it, in the interest of mankind, that seems to Him wise
- Since God created the seventh day Sabbath as a day set aside for fellowship between man and God, Jesus is revealing His identity as the divine Messiah who has the authority to interpret the Law, even the Law associated with the keeping of the Sabbath

Healing on the Sabbath (12:9-14)



- Since it was the Sabbath, Jesus and His disciples attend the prayer service at the local synagogue of the Pharisees who had challenged Him
- The Pharisees are not willing to let the debate rest and ask Jesus if it is lawful to cure on the Sabbath "hoping to trap Him so they can again accuse Him of rejecting the Law
- St. Mark and St. Luke (Mk 3:2; Lk 6:7) say they "watched Him whether He would heal on the Sabbath day."
- They were now come to the length of tracking His steps, to collect materials for a charge of transgression against Him

Healing on the Sabbath (12:9-14)



- If sheep can be lifted out of its suffering on the Sabbath, why not much more a man?
- In these passages Jesus, as the authoritative teacher who is Lord of the Sabbath, answers the question concerning "work" on the Sabbath through two principles:
 - a. Mercy and compassion toward man and beast is an acceptable "work of mercy" on the Sabbath (Mt 12:1-7)
 - b. Doing good on the Sabbath is allowed because it fulfills the commandments concerning love of God and love of one's neighbor (Mt 12:12; also see 22:34-40)

Healing on the Sabbath (12:9-14)



- The poor man might have said that he had no strength to stretch his hand
- However, at the command of the Lord he made the effort and obeyed at once
- He had faith in this wonderful Healer and he was healed
- He disregarded the proud and malicious Pharisees, and thus gloriously put them to shame
- The opposition of the Pharisees has taken a decidedly evil turn
- These men, who believed in a strictly literal interpretation of the Law, are now planning on how to have Jesus killed

Behold, My Servant (12:15-21)



- When Jesus read the wicked hearts and thoughts of the Pharisees, He left the Synagogue and perhaps the town, but He continued to heal many people
- He avoided unnecessary danger until his earthly ministry was accomplished
- A man of God is not afraid of persecution
- It is the part of prudence and Christian charity not to provoke, if possible, the blind and the hardened
- Christ asked those who were healed not to make Him known
- His miracles now would intensify the hate of His enemies
- St. Matthew here quotes a passage from Isaiah 42:1-4

Behold, My Servant (12:15-21)



- These are the words of God the Father, speaking to the church, concerning Christ, as mediator; who, as such, is God's servant
- Called a servant from His taking the form of a servant, or His being born in a humble condition Philippians 2:7, and from his obeying or "serving" God, Hebrews 10:9
- He was His elect and, as such, He was always delighted in His person, well pleased with His office, and the discharge of it, and which He declared more than once by a voice from heaven, as at His baptism, and at His transfiguration on the mount
- He who always was the object of His love, not only as His own and only begotten Son, but as in His office capacity, as mediator
- He will publish the Gospel to the heathens

Behold, My Servant (12:15-21)



- This prophecy was fulfilled by the multitudes coming to him from Idumea and beyond Jordan, and from Tyre and Sidon, as recorded by Mark 3:7-8
- The spirit of Christ is not a spirit of contention, murmuring, uproar, or controversial
- He who loves these does not belong to him
- Christ therefore fulfilled a prophecy by withdrawing from this place, on account of the rage of the Pharisees
- The reed, a hollow cylinder, if bruised has its strength destroyed
- It thus becomes the symbol of the bruised spirit
- The tender Savior will not break, but heal

Behold, My Servant (12:15-21)



- The wick of the lamp that had ceased to burn clearly
- The violent would put it out and fling it away
- The Lord does not use such violence with those disciples who give forth some light, even if it is imperfect
- Till He shall sit in power and triumph on the throne of judgment
- He will pronounce sentence and judgment, in spite of the world and Satan, and show Himself conqueror over all His enemies

A House Divided Cannot Stand (12:22-30)



- Encouraged by the healing of the man with the deformed hand, the people brought Jesus a man whose possession by demons had left him both blind and mute
- Satan blinds the eyes by unbelief, and seals up the lips from prayer
- The question put in this form (in Greek) suppose doubt, and expect rather a negative answer, the meaning is, "Can it possibly be?"
- The people indicated their secret impression that this must be He the promised Messiah King who was to be the Son of David, according to the prophets (Isa 11:10 2 Sam 23:5)
- However, it was a negative answer to avoid the wrath of the priests

A House Divided Cannot Stand (12:22-30)



- St. Mark 3:22-27 says that some of these Pharisees were scribes who had come from Jerusalem
- The ecclesiastical authorities at Jerusalem were now keeping their watch on Jesus
- The bitterest enemies of our Lord were unable to deny the reality of His miracles
- But to deprive Him of the glory of it, and even reproach Him for it, and to bring Him into contempt with the people, they not only speak of Him in a mocking manner “this fellow”; but ascribe the miracle he wrought to familiarity with the devil, to diabolical influence and skill in magic art

A House Divided Cannot Stand (12:22-30)



- They had not made this charge to Christ, but to the multitudes
- However, He knew their thoughts
- This is the second time Jesus has been accused of healing by the power of Beelzebul, "the prince of demons" (9:34)
- Jesus uses three arguments to refute the Pharisees claim that He exorcises demons by the power of Beelzebul/Satan
- The first argument: A general truth is stated
- Most states and kingdoms fall, not by the power of foreign enemies, but by the weakness due to divisions
- The welfare of any kingdom, city, or family, depends on its harmony and unity

A House Divided Cannot Stand (12:22-30)



- Satan, like every other ruler and emperor, must wish to rule his empire in peace and security; how then can he be in league with Christ, who oppose his authority, and is destroying his kingdom?
- If Jesus was on Satan's side, He would act for his interest and confirm his influence among people; but He opposes his sayings by His doctrine, and his influence by His power
- The second argument: Christ showed them that it might as well be applied to them as to Him
- Their disciples, taught by them, pretended to cast out devils

A House Divided Cannot Stand (12:22-30)



- If their argument be true that a man who casts out devils must be in league with the devil, then "your disciples" have made a covenant with him also
- He is telling them that they must therefore either give up this argument, or admit that the working of miracles is proof of the assistance of God
- The Pharisees stood self-condemned, as expressed in Luke 11:19
- If it is the power of God manifest in Me, then it demonstrates that I am the expected Messiah King, the Son of David, of whom the multitude spoke

A House Divided Cannot Stand (12:22-30)



- In His third line of defense Jesus asks, “Or how can one enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man?”
- No one can enter a man's house and take his goods unless he has first conquered him
- If I am not the Messiah, stronger than Satan, how could I spoil him?
- The strong man is Satan ("the prince/ruler of this world"), his house is the earth, and his property consists of those who are not the children of God
- By casting out demons, Jesus is tying up the "strong man's (Satan) power and plundering his "house.”

A House Divided Cannot Stand (12:22-30)



- This interpretation is made clear in Jesus' next statement in verse 30
- The two kingdoms of Satan and of Christ are opposed
- No neutrality is possible; there is no middle ground
- Those who are with Jesus belong to God and whoever does not follow Jesus is against God's plan for the coming of the Kingdom
- He has come to shepherd His people and to proclaim the Kingdom by gathering the lost sheep of Israel (Ezek 34:11-16; Mt 2:6; Mt 15:24), while the Pharisees who stand in opposition to Him are the wicked shepherds who scatter the sheep (Ezek 34:1-6)

The Unpardonable Sin (12:31-32)



- God places no limits upon His mercy in the offer of His gift of salvation by the Holy Spirit through the sacrifice of Christ Jesus
- The Church teaches that every human sin can be repented and forgiven with one exception: anyone who deliberately and repeatedly refuses to accept God's mercy and the gift of eternal life offered by the Holy Spirit up to the moment he takes his last breath in death commits the final sin that is past pardoning and that person condemns himself to the loss of eternal life

A Tree Known by Its Fruit (12:33-37)



- The effect will be always similar to the cause; a bad tree will produce bad fruit, and a good tree, good fruit
- The malicious accusations of the Pharisees reveal the malice and evil in their hearts "their rotten "fruit" that identifies them as evil
- Christ rebukes the leadership of the Old Covenant people with the same words St. John used, calling them a "brood of vipers" (Mt 3:7)
- Their hearts were thoroughly evil, hence they could only speak and do evil, for out of the good treasure of the heart the mouth speaks



A Tree Known by Its Fruit (12:33-37)

- The good heart is the good treasury, and the treasure that is in it is the love of God, and of all mankind
- The bad heart is the bad treasury, and its treasure is the carnal mind, which is enmity against God, and ill-will to man
- Christ closes this address to his malignant and wicked hearers by a serious declaration that for these things God would bring them into judgment
- Therefore; they who had spoken so malignantly against Him, could not escape



A Tree Known by Its Fruit (12:33-37)

- If we shall be called on to give account for every idle, rash, inconsiderate word, how much more for such blasphemy as the Pharisees had uttered?
- How careful, too, should we be to see that our speech is pure!
- Words reveal the true character (heart) of a person
- Words are the indication of the true principles of the heart; by words the heart shall be known, as the tree is by its fruit
- On Judgment Day everyone will be held accountable for their "bad fruit" in the thoughtless and hurtful words they speak



The Scribes and Pharisees Ask for a Sign (12:38-42)

- A sign that is something of an immediate and decisive nature, to show, not that His miracles were real—that they seemed willing to admit—but that they were from above, not from beneath
- Signs were granted to those who desired them to confirm their faith, as Abraham and Gideon; but denied to those who demanded them to excuse their unbelief
- Jesus never worked miracles to gratify human curiosity, or to secure popular applause
- We must keep in mind that the Lord is speaking to His enemies
- He compares them to a faithless wife
- They were faithless to God, Matthew 16:4



The Scribes and Pharisees Ask for a Sign (12:38-42)

- The resurrection of Christ from the dead by His own power, called here the sign of the prophet Jonah, was the great proof of Christ's being the Messiah
- This was the second public announcement of His resurrection three days after His death, (For the first, see Jn 2:19)
- The period during which He was to lie in the grave is here expressed in round numbers, according to the Jewish way of speaking, which was to regard any part of a day, however small, included within a period of days, as a full day, (1 Sam 30:12,13; Es 4:16; 5:1; Mt 27:63,64, &c.)

The Scribes and Pharisees Ask for a Sign (12:38-42)



- The miracle was the preservation of the life of Jonah during his living burial
- This was a type of the burial and resurrection of Christ
- Nineveh was the great capital of the Assyrian Empire, situated on the Tigris river, in its day the greatest city in the world, to which Jonah was sent to warn it of judgment for its sins
- They repented at the preaching of Jonah, but this generation of Jews remained unrepentant under the preaching of one greater than Jonah; the Ninevites condemn the Jews
- The queen of the south: Of Sheba (1 Kgs 10:1), supposed to be Sabaea in Southern Arabia

The Scribes and Pharisees Ask for a Sign (12:38-42)



- She came from a remote country to hear the wisdom of a mere man, though a gifted one, and was transported with wonder at what she saw and heard (1 Kgs 10:1-9)
- She would condemn that generation, for she came "a great distance" to hear the wisdom of Solomon, but the Jews of that age would not listen to the wisdom of one "much greater" than Solomon, though present with them
- They, when a Greater than Solomon had come to them, despised and rejected, insulted and slandered Him

An Unclean Spirit Returns (12:43-45)



- The application of these three verses is found in even *so it shall be unto this wicked generation (Mt 12:45), the Jews*
- *With an occasional tendency to repentance*, as under the preaching of John, they became worse and worse until they crucified the Lord and were destroyed
- A man with an unclean spirit, a demon, is chosen to represent them
- He goes out (transient repentance), returns with seven other evil spirits worse than himself (a relapse into sin), and the last state is worse than the first, more wicked and more wretched
- So generally with those who dally with sin

An Unclean Spirit Returns (12:43-45)



- If Jesus' generation persists in resisting His call to repentance and purification, they will grow worse
- He has come to heal them, but refusal to repent will only be an invitation to fall more deeply into sin and further away from God
- What Jesus said is also true of those who reject the Gospel message of salvation today
- If one doesn't make God the center of one's life, one will find other "gods" in a useless attempt to fill the empty space "material possessions, self-worship, work, alcohol and other addictions

Jesus' Mother and Brothers Send for Him (12:46-50)



- Christ was so focused on his work, that no natural or other duty took him from it
- Not that, under deception of religion, we may be disrespectful to parents, or unkind to relations; but the lesser duty must stand by, while the greater is done
- Jesus was expanding the definition of His family with the invitation that all who became His disciples also became His cherished family members
- He was defining family by the covenant bond of obedience to God the Father
- St. Mary is the model disciple, submitting herself to the will of God for her life and supporting Jesus in His ministry by petitioning Him in His first public sign



Conclusion

- What two examples of lawful work associated with what is holy does Jesus give the Pharisees from the history of the covenant people?
- Why did the Pharisees decide to seek Jesus' death?
- Why did Jesus warn the people He healed not to make His healings known?
- What are the three arguments Jesus uses to reveal the senselessness of the Pharisees claim?



Conclusion

- What is “blasphemy against the Spirit”? Why can it not be forgiven?
- What is the irony of the comparison Jesus makes between His generation and the Gentiles of Nineveh and the Gentile Queen of Sheba?
- Who did Jesus identify as His true family?



Conclusion

For Application:

- What kinds of works do you engage in on the Christian Sabbath, the Lord's Day? How do you use the day of rest? What do you think Jesus would make of the way you use it?
- How carefully do you think before you speak? What does this passage suggest to you regarding casual talk that is critical of others?
- After you receive forgiveness of sin, do you respond by growing in virtue? Are you leaving your soul open to the return of old, sinful habits or to the grace of God?
- How would you recognize a brother or sister of Jesus today?