

A TURNING POINT IN THE MINISTRY OF JESUS

OH! WHAT A DAY IT WAS!!!

In the Gospel of Matthew we get a very good synopsis of the Life and Ministry of Jesus from more of a Jewish perspective than in the other Gospel accounts. Matthew is written originally in Hebrew and it was written mostly to Jewish believers. We know that the Gospel of Mark is thought to be the first of the Gospels written. Matthew's account of Jesus life was written after Mark's Gospel account. We see different events of Jesus life. However, we also see many of the same events that we see in Mark's Gospel. However, the events that are similar, we see Matthew extend and explain more. He explains them with more of the Jewish thought in mind.

In Matthew 12 we see a "turning point" in Jesus' ministry. Up until this time in Matthew 12, Jesus' ministry was known by the Jewish Leadership and they were keeping "an eye" on Him. Jesus knew this and was waiting for the proper time to address the problem of the "righteousness of the Pharisees." In Matthew 12 we see very clearly that the time had come.

Up to this point in time, the Pharisees and the other religious leaders had tolerated Jesus' ministry believing that it would fade away as many others had. We must realize and grasp the point that there were many other people who had come and claimed to be the Jewish Messiah. This is told to us in Acts 5:34-39 when a man named Gamaliel, who was highly respected by the Jewish council, spoke up concerning Jesus. Basically, he said that if Jesus was a "false messiah" he and his followers would fade away as many others did. However, if Jesus was the true Messiah there was nothing they could do to stop people from accepting and believing in Him because it would be God's plan. To that I say, Amen!!!"

However, at this point, back in Matthew 12, we read that the Pharisees and other Jewish leaders were going to be "called out" and exposed by Jesus. It was Jesus who was going to make the first move in showing the people the true ways of God. A key in grasping the importance of what Jesus was about to say and show on this day is actually found at the conclusion of this day as found in Matthew 13:9 when Jesus declared, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

The lessons we learn from this section of scripture is that we need to be careful that we do not put God into a nice, neat little box. We do this by thinking we have it all and that we understand it all. We must never get to that place. Jesus said that our righteousness must exceed that of the "righteousness of the Pharisees." In Matthew 12, Jesus gives us a very good synopsis of what the "righteousness of the Pharisees" entailed and how Jesus was about to expose this. It is also interesting to note that this was all done on the Sabbath. Hmm...

Let's begin our discussion with Matthew 12:1-8 (KJV)

"At that time Jesus went on the Sabbath day through the corn; and his disciples were an hungered, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat. ² But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day. ³ But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungred, and they that were with him; ⁴ How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests? ⁵ Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless? ⁶ But I say unto you, That in this place is one greater than the temple. ⁷ But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless. ⁸ For the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day.

This event had occurred about 1½ years into the ministry of Jesus. It happened early on a Sabbath morning. The disciples were hungry and began to pluck the grains and eat them. The Pharisees immediately accused them of working on the Sabbath. In verses 3-4, Jesus gave them the example of David coming to the Tabernacle on a Sabbath with his men looking and asking for food from the High Priest, Ahimelech. The account is found in 1Samuel 21:1-6.

The bread that David had asked for was not “lawful” for him or any other “non-High Priest” to eat. It was from the Table of Shewbread that was in the Tabernacle. Every Sabbath the High Priest (Ahimelech) was to replace the 12 loaves that were on the table with fresh loaves. The “old loaves” were then given to the High priest (Ahimelech) to eat as his portion of food. To make a long story short, the scriptures tell us that Ahimelech chose to “break from the law” and let David and his men eat. Why did Jesus use this account?

Jesus continues in verse 5 as He gives another example saying that the priests of the Temple actually “violate” the Law – even to that day. How were they doing this? The priests needed to replace the showbread every Sabbath and it must be fresh. Therefore the Priests had to bake it very early in the morning on that Sabbath. They were therefore “working” on the Sabbath and therefore “violating” the Law of no work on the Sabbath. What was Jesus trying to teach them in both these examples?

What Jesus was actually expressing in both of these accounts, was that the need of the people actually supersedes the Law. The moral aspects of the Law supersede the ceremony of the Law. It is the “spirit of the Law” and not the “letter of the Law” that they were to follow. The Pharisees were following the “letter of the Law,” not the spirit of the Law.

Jesus then makes a bold statement and declares in verse 8 that He is the “*Lord even of the Sabbath.*” Jesus was telling the Pharisees that He was and still is, the expert and authority on the things concerning, not only the Law, but the Sabbath as well, not them. After all He made the Sabbath and is He is ultimately the true Sabbath. Man’s true rest and resting place can only be found in and through Jesus.

Immediately following that encounter with the Pharisee and the religious leaders, He then goes into their synagogue. It is still the Sabbath, the same day. In Matthew 12:9-13, we read that Jesus heals a man who has a “withered hand.” This, again, is looked down upon by the religious leaders because they believed and taught that this would be considered “work” and should not therefore be done on the Sabbath. Jesus proceeds to go into a “teaching mode” to show the foolishness of their way of thinking.

He teaches that they would help one of their animals on the Sabbath if they fell into a pit. Jesus states that a person is so much more valuable than an animal so why would it be wrong to help someone or heal someone on the Sabbath. No one answers Him. Jesus heals the man.

In verse 14, we see that the Pharisees and other religious leaders were getting upset with Jesus. They go outside and hold a “council” on how they may destroy Him. This is still the Sabbath. According to their “tradition of the Law” this would be considered work yet they still did it anyway. A man’s heart will truly be exposed when things do not go their way. Hmm...

We read in verses 15-16 that Jesus knew their thoughts and left the synagogue. We then read verses 17-21 where Jesus quotes Isaiah 42:1-4 – Expressing that Messiah will come as a humble servant (representing the first coming of Jesus). Jesus expresses that at this “first coming” He will not come as a conquering King. That will be, however, at His second coming. Hmm.....

Next, on that same Sabbath day we read Matthew 12:22-28 (KJV)

“Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spoke and saw. ²³ And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David? ²⁴ But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils. ²⁵ And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand: ²⁶ And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand? ²⁷ And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges. ²⁸ But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you.

In Matthew 12:22-28, on the same day, the Sabbath, Jesus delivers a person who was possessed by a demon. Jesus casts out the demon and the man is delivered. The religious leaders immediately accuse Him of being a devil himself. They call him, Beelzebul, which literally refers to Jesus as being a prince of the devils. Jesus makes the statement that their own children will be their judges. What does He mean by this?

The Pharisees believed and taught exorcism to their own “disciples.” Therefore, Jesus was saying if their own disciples had cast out demons then they and their disciples, their “children,” must be of the devil. He was showing them that they were declaring a double standard. On the one hand, they were saying that Jesus was a devil because the devils would leave if He told them to go but that when they and their disciples told the demons to go it was of God. Do you see the “double standard” that they were presenting?

However, in verse 28, Jesus declares therefore, that if He casts out demons **by the Spirit of God** than the Kingdom of God has come – it was right in front of them. However, they were not expecting or ready for it and therefore they did not nor could they truly see it. They were actually blind to seeing the Kingdom of God - who was right in front of them in the form of Jesus.

Next we read, again on the same Sabbath, Matthew 12:31-32 (KJV)

“Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. ³² And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.

Jesus declares that they, the Pharisees and the religious leaders that were present, were actually blaspheming the Holy Spirit. Mark 3:30 tells what this is. It was because they were saying that Jesus was of the devil and that the works He did was from the devil and not from God. They were declaring that the works Jesus did was not from God or the Holy Spirit, “...because they said He had an unclean spirit.”

Jesus was telling them very plainly that they were getting on very dangerous ground. It wasn’t that they were just coming against Him but now they were declaring that the works that He did was from the devil. In other words, now they were really calling the works of the Holy Spirit the works of the devil. Jesus declares that saying and believing that was very, very dangerous.

Jesus is teaching on this same topic as He continues in Matthew 12:33-37 (KJV)

“Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit. ³⁴ O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. ³⁵ A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. ³⁶ But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. ³⁷ For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.”

Verses 33-37 are linked with verses 31-32. The “idle words” that the religious leaders were saying, that He was from the devil, was revealing what was truly in their heart. If they were ready and prepared for Messiah they would know Him and declare Him. Their own words declare their rejection of Jesus which will condemn them to eternal judgment. Jesus refers to them as a “*generation of vipers.*”

He plainly calls them “evil.” They would be accountable for every evil and idle word that they had spoken concerning not only Jesus but of the Holy Spirit as well. Every word they had spoken, every word we speak, shall be justified or condemned. What every person ultimately speaks is ultimately what is in their heart. The truth will come forth. For many of these religious leaders, their words and their actions were boldly declaring not only their rejection of God’s Messiah, Jesus, but they were rejecting and blaspheming God’s Holy Spirit. Ultimately, in doing these things they were rejecting and blaspheming God, the Father, as well.

As we move on, later that same day, on the Sabbath, we read what took place in Matthew 12:38-42 (KJV). *“Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee. ³⁹ But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: ⁴⁰ For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. ⁴¹ The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here. ⁴² The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here.”*

As mentioned previously, this was a little later on the same Sabbath. They asked Jesus for a “sign.” Jesus plainly speaks that only an “evil and adulteress” generation seeks after signs. Why is this so? I believe it is because those who have true faith in God do not need a sign. They simply believe. It is said in the Word many times that signs and wonders are really for those that do not believe. They are given so that many who don’t believe will, hopefully, see and then believe. Here, the religious leaders who should have believed in Jesus were asking for a “sign.” This obviously was pointing to the fact that they were not believing that He was the Son of God.

Jesus tells them that the only “sign” they would see would be that which the Book of Jonah reveals as He tells in verses 39-41. What does Jesus mean by using Jonah? We know that Jonah was in the “belly of the fish” for three days. However, Jesus was not really speaking of that section of Jonah even though it did signify Jesus’ resurrection. Yes that would be a “sign” but not the “sign” He was referring to.

The real “sign” will be a move of great repentance such as the city of Nineveh had. Jonah, in Jewish thinking, is a book that is all about “repenting.” Jonah and the Ninevites both repented. That is the “sign” that Jonah truly points to – a time of true repentance.

In verse 42 Jesus speaks of the “Queen of the south” (Sheba- Ethiopia) who came to Solomon to ask deep questions about his God. She went back to Ethiopia possibly as a convert to Judaism and believing in their God. Today, there are many Ethiopian Jews. Phillip encountered one who accepted Jesus and was baptized.

Jesus continues to say to them, on that same Sabbath, in Matthew 12:43-45 (KJV): *“When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. ⁴⁴ Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. ⁴⁵ Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation.”*

This is a well know scripture reference. The “key” to these verses is found at the end of verse 45, *“Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation.”* Jesus was referring to the wicked generation of that day. He was referring to the Pharisees and all those who were rejecting Him.

Let’s review a brief history of the Pharisees -

The Pharisees were not always a part of Judaism. They came into being just after the Macabean revolt which returned Jerusalem back to the Jews temporarily just prior to the Roman occupation. (circa 165-160BC) The term Pharisee means “separated ones.” They wanted to return back to fundamental Judaism with an emphasis on looking for and awaiting Messiah to come. They started off in a good direction. They cleaned up their act and “swept their house clean.” However, over the years and in the generations that came and up to Jesus’ time they did not “fill their house” with righteousness but rather with self-righteousness. The devil was allowed to come in. Therefore, because their lives were not filled with the true things of God, the devil was able to come back seven times worse than what they started out to do.

Next, on that same Sabbath, we read in Matthew 12:46-50 (KJV)

“While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him. ⁴⁷ Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee. ⁴⁸ But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? ⁴⁹ And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! ⁵⁰ For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.”

Jesus was not neglecting or disrespecting His mother or family. We are not told whether or not He ultimately, met with them. The main thing was that He did not want to lose the thought to what He was teaching. It would be easy to get distracted and go see His mother. However, this was not the time for that. Actually, His mother and brothers were there to take Him home. They thought He was, let’s say, not well.

We must know when we are or are not, to do certain things. Jesus was teaching and this was the time that His ministry was truly taking a turn. It may seem as though He was disrespecting His mother but He was actually honoring the Father and putting Him first. This is difficult for many to decipher and recognize. The things of God should always take precedent. We see, that through this incident, that He used it to express who His true “spiritual” family was - those who would do the **will of the Father**. The will of the Father is to believe in the Son - Jesus. Spiritual relationship with the Father is primary. Through Jesus we are “family.”

We must notice that in Chapter 13:1, it tells us very clearly, *“That same day...”* Many came to hear Him as He went now went down to the seaside to teach. He ends the day, this same Sabbath day, with the people giving a valuable lesson as given in a parable -the parable of “the Sower,” as found in Matthew 13:3-8.

In Matthew 13:9, we see Jesus declare, *“Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.”* The first time this phrase is used is found in Matthew 11:15 in which Jesus was referring to a “new day” that John the Baptist, as the forerunner, had ushered in – the day of Messiah. This phrase is simply telling all who hears His words that if you want to know the truth, you will receive the truth.

Jesus was officially stating that a “new day” has come. It was the day that John the Baptist was heralding. Now, Jesus was declaring it. Let those who have a hardness of heart and refuse to repent and accept the Gospel message because they are stuck in the laws of tradition be judged for that. A new time has come. If you truly desire truth, you will find it. If you truly hear what Jesus is saying, then you will truly comprehend and adhere to His teachings. You **will** understand. The Holy Spirit **will** come and bring **all** understanding and truth.

Jesus states the conclusion of this whole day’s teaching in Matthew 13:11-17 (KJV). He states that many ears have *“waxed dull.”* In other words there are many who will not hear – not only because they do not believe but because they are so stuck in their traditions and incorrect attitudes of heart concerning approaching and serving God, that that cannot hear truth.

However, Matthew 13:16 and 17 tell us what the result and ultimate blessing that will be experienced by those who truly seek after and hear the truth as spoken by the Son of God, Jesus. We read it as Jesus, Himself declares, *“But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.”*

Jesus is referring to those in whom we read of in Hebrews 11. In Hebrews 11 we read of all those who had believed in the promise of the coming Messiah. We many times refer to it as the section known as “The Heroes of Faith.” However, the fact remained that they were all **still looking forward to the coming of Messiah**.

In Hebrews 11:39 we read, “*And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, **received not the promise...***” We see that these “heroes of faith” all have received a “good report” because of their faith in their God. Unfortunately, they were still waiting for the coming of Messiah. However, in verse 40 it states that God now has provided **something better**. That “something better” is the true salvation that is now given to all those who believe in and accept Jesus, the Messiah, as their personal Lord and Savior. This includes all the “heroes of faith” we read about in Hebrews 11, as well as, we have said, all those who truly believe in Jesus, today.

Wow... What a day that Jesus had. Remember, it was a Sabbath!!! Great things happen on the Sabbath. Oh, what a day!!! What a day for all those who truly heard what Jesus said. It was a turning point for Jesus’ ministry here on this earth. Do we hear what Jesus said and continues to say to us through His Word? Again, I say, what a day for all those who truly heard Him. What a day for all those who hear these words today and truly believe in Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior. Yes, what a day...