

The Gospel According to

Matthew

Lesson #15 – Ch.12

The Lord of the Sabbath – Matthew 12:1-14

The Pharisees plan to destroy Jesus – Matthew 12:15-21

Blaspheming the Holy Spirit – Matthew 12:22-32

What comes from your mouth will reveal what is in your heart – Matthew 12:33-37

Pharisees demand a sign – Matthew 12:38-42

Jesus' true family – Matthew 12:46-50

Before we begin our study, I want you to pray with me. We are going to pray Scripture today. These particular Scriptures are found in Psalm 119. I have chosen The Message version for our prayer because it is so easy to understand and seems to express what my heart pleads when I find myself strained for words.

Would you bow before Him with me?

“God, teach me lessons of living so I can stay on course. Teach me your statutes- train me to live by Your counsel” (Psalm 119:33). “With Your very own hands, You have formed me – now breathe wisdom over me so I can understand You” (Psalm 119:73). Bring me into the purposes You have for me.

“You are my place of *quiet retreat*. Come be beside me this morning as I sit quietly before You. I will wait for Your Word to renew me” (Psalm 119:114). Bring me refreshment through Your Word as I go through this study. Amen

Oh Lord, renew us with the knowledge of Your Word. Take us from a place of worry, anxiety, and tension to a place of quiet calm in our hearts. Remove from us any self-appointed burdens that we weren't meant to carry, and replace it with Your peace. We acknowledge it isn't a burden to serve You. As a child of God, I want to live in Your peace. I want to trust you in *all* my circumstances. I want You to increase my faith until I can comfortably believe that you are working where I cannot see; until I can rest in knowing that where I am going, You have already been. You see my tomorrows; You have provided all that I am going to need when I get there! What a comforting thought. There is nowhere I am headed that You have not already been and provided for.

I love this quiet place of retreat with You, Lord. It's like a secret place, a place of vacation for my soul in a noisy, busy world. Draw me to this place with You often in my day, and remind me in my hurried life to come to You for times of refreshment. Now I ask again Lord: breathe wisdom over me so I can better understand You. - Amen

I read a great story this morning that fits right in with our lesson this week:

A man was driving an old Ford on a lonely road when it chugged to a stop. He was at a loss about what to do since he didn't know much about cars. He got out, put the hood up, and began to tap here and there, jiggle this wire and that (sounds like something I would do; I'm not sure why we do that... knowing nothing about cars, and thinking that would possibly do anything!). Anyway, that is when he heard the roar of a car coming toward him. As it got closer, he saw it was a brand-new Lincoln. The fellow was nice enough to pull over. He stepped out, walked up, and said, "What's the trouble?" "Oh," the other man said, "I can't get this old Ford to go." "Well," replied the Good Samaritan, "Let's see." So he began to tinker inside and started it right up. "Say, thanks a lot! That's great. Who are you?" Putting his coat back on, the man said, "Well, I'm Henry Ford. I ought to know a little about that car we made."

Who else should know more about that car than good ol' Henry? In the same manner, **our God ought to know a little about what we need; after all, it was He that created us! Who could know us better? His eyes are fixed on you, and He has just what you need to keep moving forward!**

Human beings often need to be rescued. When we go with Him to the quiet place and we finally chug to a stop, He can replace insufficient parts with those that enable us to drive through life with more power. His refreshing presence refuels us, His Words uphold us, and His council gives us the ability to stay on course. No motor can go forever. Every motor needs refueling and a time to shut down, just like every child of God will come to an end of their own self-sufficiency and need the power of God to sustain them.

The Lord-in His wisdom- provided a time for refueling and rest for His children. He even instated a law in His commandments to Moses and the people of Israel. Exodus 20:8-11 is the commandment to have a day of rest, or Sabbath day. They were instructed by the Lord to work hard for six days and then rest on the seventh day. God did the same as an example to us when He created heaven and earth in the book of Genesis.

Isn't it a curious thing that we have to be *instructed* to rest? (I know some that need to be instructed to work!) But many of us are the opposite; we have to be reminded that rest is also spiritual. Somehow in our American mindset we believe that resting is wasting time. Progress, progress, progress, and the faster the better! That is our American motto. Remember in our opening prayer we prayed, "Lord, teach me *lessons for living* so that I can stay on course?" This concept of rest is one of those *lessons for living*.

If you are going to go strong for the Lord for many years, learning to rest is vital.

Last week we ended Matthew Ch.11 with one of my favorite "active" Scriptures in the entire Bible. The older I get in the Lord, the more I use this Scripture as a *lesson for living*. Remember Matthew 11:28: "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." This is the key to maintaining a joyful, peaceful, unburdened life! We have to continually escape to that quiet place with Him and exchange our worries for His promises, our anxiety for His peace, and our doubts for renewed faith. I practice this lesson many times a day. It's like a perpetual Sabbath. Little "mini-retreats" with Jesus daily fuel me to finish my day well and in the Spirit.

The word Sabbath in Scripture is the word "Shabbat", which means to rest or to cease from work. We can have a Sabbath every day because the Lord's temple is in our hearts, and

His presence dwells there. We have access to Him any moment we wish. We don't have to travel to a temple made with human hands to participate in a holy day. Every day is holy as we walk side-by-side with our Savior and enjoy Him. We can have holy days – even holy minutes if we need to. If my day is extremely busy, I take little 10 minute holy breaks with Him. Those mini-moments help me to go through my day not bound in worry.

Today was a day I desperately needed a few mini- retreats or “mini - Sabbaths”, so many needs, so many problems to solve. By mid-day I was cross and tense. I took a moment and sat in my car in the grocery store parking lot and allowed the sun to hit my face. I tilted my head back and talked to God as my friend. “God, sometimes there are just too many needs and not enough of me to take care of them all. I don't even possess the ability to change someone else's thinking, attitude, or desires. Only You have the power to do these major things. So, I give all the “I cannot's” to a God who can. I place my list of concerns in Your hands, the God who controls the Universe. Surely my list is not too hard for YOU! Now, I walk away without the burden or responsibility to change what I cannot. Thank you for allowing me to give the burden to You, the one who has the power to make real change!”

In my mind it was settled: I would no longer shoulder that list of concerns. I got out of my car free, feeling the refreshment of a private “mini Sabbath” with my God.

The Lord of the Sabbath – Matthew 12:1-14

Read Matthew 12:1-14

Here they go again. These ol' Pharisees and religious leaders were *determined* to find fault with Christ. They couldn't deny His supernatural powers because they witnessed with their own eyes the miracles He was doing, but they just refused to believe that He was truly the Messiah. It just didn't compute, and it wasn't because there was a lack of evidence; it was due to their hardened hearts.

1. The Pharisees accuse Jesus and His disciples of doing something unlawful. What was it? Matthew 12:1-2?

2. According to God's commands, was it unlawful to harvest on the Sabbath? See Exodus 34:21. _____

In biblical times, travelers would pass through rows in the grain fields because there weren't always roads to travel upon. The disciples weren't harvesting the wheat; they were just hungry. They picked a few grains of wheat, rubbed them between their palms, and popped the kernels into the mouths as they went along. Jesus had always emphasized the intent of the law, not the letter of the law. The intent of the law was to prepare a Sabbath (a time to rest from hard labor) and rest in the Lord. The Lord never intended that law should overlook human need or acts of kindness. The human need at that moment was 12 hungry disciples. They were not harvesting for money or storing up grain for personal gain; they were filling their hungry bellies on a long journey!

The religious leaders created all these evil amendments to the law. There were chapters in the Talmud filled with rituals to obey that were added to what God had placed in His Word. To be able to observe them all was a burden most could not fulfill.

3. The Lord in His wisdom provided laws for these times. What does Deuteronomy 23:25 tell us about this situation?

Ok, that Scripture tells me it would be ok to pluck grain and eat if you are hungry as long as you didn't go too far and bring a sickle to do some major damage. See how practical God is?

Here's a thought - what were the Pharisees doing out there in the wheat fields anyway? They were rich religious leaders that had plenty of food at home. I wonder if they were following Jesus for the sole purpose of finding fault in this Jewish leader! Besides, didn't Jesus have the right to eat grain from His father's field?

The Pharisees were big on obeying the Sabbath. Of all the laws of the 10 Commandments, they made sure to follow this one. It's interesting that this is the only one of the ten that is a "non-moral" law. All the other commandments regulate moral behavior. Did the Pharisees revere this command because, to the onlooker, it gave them the perception of being highly religious? I mean, everyone notices who goes to church, right? And if you are in church more than several times a week... well then, you must be a spiritual superstar! The Sabbath law to the Pharisee was the pinnacle of religiosity.

Pride is a sin that God hates. Jesus calls them out many times in the New Testament on it. This should make us all reflect on our own motives for church-going.

4. Read Matthew 12:3-4 and compare it with the same story in 1 Samuel 21:1-6. Why did David go into the temple and eat the showbread?

You see, human need took precedence over the law. David and his men needed to be fed at the time. The religious leaders highly revered King David, and Jesus knew the Pharisees would have to condemn King David for his actions if they were accusing Jesus of the same action.

If that weren't enough to get them all in a tizzy, Jesus makes one great announcement. What was it (Matthew 12:6)?

Say whhaaaattt?!

That about did it. Nothing was greater than the temple at that point of time in Jewish history. Jesus was claiming to be the "Son of God" (v.8). This truth is still the stumbling block of Jews today. They could not believe that Jesus Christ claimed to be the Messiah, the Son of

God, the King of the Jews sent to earth in human flesh. Their eyes were closed and they could hardly hear with their ears because their hearts had become calloused.

We have no evidence that Jesus ever led a church service, but we do know He was all about meeting needs. We have abundant evidence that He fed the hungry, healed the sick, and released the oppressed from demons. The religious leaders were more concerned with the law and using the law to entrap Christ than the intent of the law which was given to show each man/woman their need for a Savior.

The New Testament doesn't require Sabbath observance, but allows freedom in this choice. Sunday was chosen because it was the day the Lord was raised from the dead, but whatever day you choose, it should be a day of rest and a day to glorify Him.

5. Do you know someone who seems to put more emphasis on going to church than a personal relationship with Christ? _____

6. This story is a good reminder to teach our children that it isn't church attendance and obedience to God's laws that make us spiritual. I think it's vitality important that families go to church together, but we also need to teach them that quiet time alone with God is more important. The memories of mom and dad sitting in front of their Bibles with bowed heads should be just as vivid in their minds as loading the family in the car and driving off to church. What do you think?

This is a great group discussion question.

If you went to church as a child, share with your group how it impacted your life.

7. Jesus was pretty bold with the Pharisees when it came to the truth and intent of God's Word. After Jesus dealt with the controversy in the grain fields, where did He go (Matt.12:9)?

He didn't go to someone's house or to someone else's synagogue. He went to THEIR synagogue! I like that! You go, God!!! He walked right into the place that they were acknowledged and praised the most. He's not intimidated to show up.

8. Who else showed up in the synagogue (v.10)? _____
What was he looking for? _____

This man came seeking help in the only place he knew: the house of God. Residing there were religious men with no passion for anything but their own dutiful persona. That day, One happened to be there that was different. Jesus the Healer was visiting that day. That day, the synagogue would be different!

9. The Pharisees' intent was to trap Jesus. What phrases or descriptive words prove this statement true? Read Mark 3:1-5.

10. What emotions did Jesus feel as He recognized the hardened hearts of the Pharisees

(Mark 3:5)?

Write out a definition for the word “grieved”.

Sometimes we forget that God can have some of the same emotions as we do. Jesus, who was God in the flesh, felt rage at their pride and arrogance, and at the same time tremendous grief because they were so lost. He is a tender but righteous God. He called them in other places of the New Testament “sheep without a Shepherd”.

11. Scripture says that God is able to know our thoughts. He peers right down in our heart-of-hearts and discerns the motive behind our actions. His holy eyes discern between the holy and unholy.

A “nugget” is a small lump of gold or precious metal. Look through the following Scriptures and mine out the “nuggets” of truth God has placed there for us to find.

Write out what you learn about man’s thoughts.

a. Psalm 94:8-13

b. Proverbs 15:26

c. Proverbs 16:1-3

d. Isaiah 55:8-9

Nobody can fool God. The Pharisees did not fool Jesus, and we cannot fool God either. He sees us completely. Nothing is hidden from His sight, so we should quit trying to hide things from Him and just deal with Him honestly. Remember – His love for you is unending.

12. God’s Word in itself is a tool used to discern our thoughts. Write out Hebrews 4:12-13. There is no intent of the heart that will be hidden. God will reveal the intent of our heart to us as we read His Word.

Jesus knew that the intent of the religious and political leaders of that day was to destroy Him.

14. Did Jesus back down from doing His Father's will just because there was pressure against His ministry? What did Jesus do after He gave the Pharisees a little "sermonette" on their own law and their own actions (Matthew 12:11-14)?

I'm sure the man with the withered hand rejoiced that religiosity didn't win the day! His hand was completely restored; it probably put him back to work, enabling him to care for his family.

The Pharisees kept silent because they knew they were caught in their own dilemma. They didn't want to be held to the restrictions they were requiring of Jesus.

15. The Pharisees kept silent, (Mark 3:4) but what was really happening in their hearts (Luke 6:11)? _____

Wow! They were filled with rage! That's a little different than *perturbed* or *ticked-off*; they were filled with fury. They were ranting and raving. Their tempers were about to blow, enough to where they were plotting revenge against this one who had embarrassed them in front of their community. They wanted this self-proclaimed healer dead.

16. What happens when we suppress that kind of anger? It doesn't take long for it to get loose somewhere. When it finds its way out, it usually comes out boiling and someone gets burned. Is a "hot temper" something you struggle with? How do you go about calming down so that you don't boil over? Any helpful hints we could all learn by? Anything, but allowing it to lead to revenge, right? Share with your group.

I want you to notice something wonderful about our Lord.

17. What was Jesus' response to the rage the Pharisees had for Him (Matthew 12:15a.)?

Jesus was outspoken about the false teachings and hypocritical attitudes of the Pharisees, but notice that His response to their hatred was simple withdrawal. Could it be that part of the reason He withdrew was because He wanted to move onto the ones who truly needed him? The sick were still waiting for a moment to be in His presence in hopes of healing. There was a timeline set by His heavenly Father as to when He would be delivered to the Romans for crucifixion. He moved on doing His father's work with those who believed in Him. He didn't retaliate against those who hated Him, which is a fulfillment Old Testament prophecy.

18. What did the prophet Isaiah declare about the coming Messiah before He was here on earth? See Isaiah 42:1-4 (See Also Matt. 12:18-21).

a. Isaiah also stated "...a bruised reed He will not break and a smoking flax He will not quench." Let me shed some light on that quote. The Message version puts it this way:

“He won’t brush aside the bruised and hurt, and He won’t disregard the small and insignificant, but He’ll steadily and firmly set things right.” Isaiah 42:3-4

Jesus saw these religious leaders as lost sheep leading lost sheep. That grieved Him, even though they were plotting to take His life!

That is magnificent love. Do you have an enemy (just an opposer) that you need to continue to love? Maybe God doesn’t want you to disregard them. You might need to withdraw while the fury rages, but God will give you words for them at the time you need them. We just saw how Jesus handled opposition.

Write out Isaiah 50:4 –7 in your own words.

“

_____”

What new idea or words of hope did this passage speak to you?

19. Jesus needed rest after He withdrew from the Pharisees. He needed a “Shabbat”, a Sabbath day (a mini retreat away from the hostility). He was exhausted; He was physically spent, and probably mentally spent. I know that sounds odd because He was Jesus, but He was deity in human form. Just like yours and mine, His flesh grew tired too. In Mark 3:9-10, Jesus tells the disciples to prepare something for Him just in case He needed to escape... to get away. What were they to do?

Did you catch that small phrase at the end of v.9? What did He feel the multitude was doing?

Jesus, the man, was feeling crushed. He really can relate to us, right?! Jesus was dog-tired! Persecution, being misunderstood, personal challenges, and long days of endless ministry had taken its toll. He just wanted to shove off for a little siesta in their little fishing boat and listen to the waves slap against the wooden vessel while it rocked Him to sleep.

The Lord sees you! Jesus understands your need for rest. He doesn’t think of you as weak if you cannot manage those little ones, hold down a 40 hr-per-week job and keep your house magazine beautiful, Pinterest perfect, all at the same time! He understands. He’s been dog-tired too!

It sends us right back to the beginning of our lesson and the life-lesson we all need to learn about the importance of rest!

**What can you do today to put some margins of rest in your schedule for your mind, soul, and body?
Let’s be creative...**

Here are some of my thoughts about how to create rest for your body, soul and mind:

- Start each morning with the Lord. Pray/journal/quiet your brain and allow Him to refresh you and lay out your day before Him. Through prayer, He will add and take away from your day's agenda. He promises to make our load light.
- If at all possible, make it a priority to get good, regulated sleep.
- When you first awake, drink 8-12 oz. of water; just down it. (Our bodies get dehydrated at night and this helps your metabolism kick in.)
- Exercise! This releases endorphins in your brain. These are chemicals that minimize pain/discomfort and the stress hormone.
- Call someone you like or love that day. We all need each other in the Body of Christ to encourage us and remind us that God is good. Be with ones that fill you up so you can go and give to those who need you to serve them.

As we go on in Matthew Ch. 12, Jesus continues His healings. In v.22 He heals a man that was demon-possessed, blind, and mute.

20. What was the response of the multitudes that witnesses this miracle? Who did they believe Jesus was (Matthew 12:23)?

21. In sharp contrast, what was the Pharisees response (v.24)?

It's so interesting to see the different responses to the power of God. Some believe unto salvation, and others continue in their disbelief.

What did the demons believe about Jesus? Mark 3:11

Even the demons had no doubt who they were dealing with, but the religious leaders of the day couldn't accept it. The Pharisees accused Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub, the ruler of demons (v.24). Jesus responds to their accusation with the truth that if Satan casts out Satan, he would divide himself, and Satan isn't going to ruin his own regime.

Blaspheming of the Holy Spirit – Matthew 12: 31-32

22. Let's write out this verse because there is sometimes some confusion about it.

Matthew 12:31 – "Therefore I say to you, every _____ and _____ will be forgiven men, but the _____ will not be forgiven men."

Just before the "therefore", Jesus said, "He who is not with Me is against me."

You cannot be with God and against God at the same time; you are either growing towards Him or growing away from Him.

It is clearly stated here that "*blasphemy of the Holy Spirit*" is **the only sin** that is not pardoned by God.

Jesus says that He pardons "blasphemies" and He pardons "sins", but he doesn't pardon blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. To question or doubt God is blasphemy, so even Christians

commit blasphemy, but if we repent of it and confess it, it is forgiven. But the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is not forgiven. To blaspheme the Holy Spirit is to have determined **unbelief!** What I mean by that is, you have to have understanding of the gospel, knowledge of the truth, and then, even after understanding, choose to reject God and His free gift of salvation. Rejecting God is the only unpardonable sin.

What comes out of your mouth reveals what is in your heart – Matthew 12:33-37

Read Matthew 12:33-37

“A tree is known by its fruit!!!”

Did you know that your mouth is a tattle-tale of what is in your heart?

Well, what type of fruit is clinging to your branches lately? _____

Do you dare tell? I'm sure we could ask your children or your husband! OOOH! They see the worst of us, don't they?

What a person is on the inside will be made evident by their mouth. We just saw that with the Pharisees, didn't we? They went away silent; they ranted and raved amongst themselves when Jesus wasn't around, which proved their hatred for the Messiah, and then their fruit was born through their actions of persecuting Jesus! Their fruit was death to the Messiah, so we know their hearts were filled with hatred toward our Lord.

23. If we skip ahead in Matthew a little bit we can see Jesus speaking about the mouth and heart again. These two parts of our bodies have such a connection. What defilement comes from our heart and out of our mouth (Matthew 15:18-20)?

Our words reveal our true character! “By your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matt. 12:37). A person who harbors anger and bitterness will eventually express those feelings.

John MacArthur said, “A person can get a good indication of his spiritual conditioning by listening to his own words.”

Wrapping it up and making it personal!

“It was Washington Irving who first said, ‘A sharp tongue is the only tool that grows keener with constant use.’ It was James, the half-brother of Jesus, who first warned: the tongue is a fire... a restless evil and full of deadly poison (James 3:6-8).”

From Chuck Swindoll's Book *Seasons of Life*

King David put it nicely... he must have wrestled a time or two with his tongue. He says in Psalm 39:1, "I will guard my ways, lest I sin with my tongue; I will restrain my mouth with a muzzle!"

Anyone else need a muzzle? Sometimes I do; thankfully, God gave us two hands to place over our lips! We could use the method we saw Jesus use in this chapter: He retreated! That's not bad advice when you're ready to blow! Go away for awhile and allow yourself time to cool off before what spews out of your mouthy volcano destroys somebody. The trouble is, after the explosion is over, you have to go back and apologize and try to patch things up, and that's sometimes embarrassing, humiliating, and even impossible.

Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks... what is stored up in your heart? It will eventually come out, you know.

If there is love, appreciation, and gratitude, you won't be able to sit back and *not* show love and gratitude to the ones you love. If it's bitterness and anger, well, that will eventually reveal itself too.

***One of my favorite quotes comes to mind. I have shared it with you before...
"If I speak when I am angry, I may just give the greatest speech I forever REGRET!"***

Oh Lord, cleanse our hearts, and prepare us each morning to be great listeners: slow to be angry, slow to speak when angry, quick to pardon, and quick to extend GRACE!

I pray that your blessings will abound this week and all those heavy-laden loads will find their way into the hands of the ONE who is able to carry them with no problem!!!

Be blessed!