

SERMON INTRODUCTION

I don't know if you've ever had a birthday party where you expected to be surprised. You knew that something was cooking, and you did not know the details, but you were expecting to be surprised!

There was an episode of the Dick Van Dyke show about that. Rob was hiding and listening in to his wife Laura talking to the neighbor Millie about the fact that she could never surprise Rob. He always seemed to know. Little did Rob know that she was on to him! When the day came, she calmly told him that they were just going to have a simple dinner at the neighbors house. When he went to the neighbors, of course he had high expectations; but there was no surprise party. ☺ Until they returned home and everyone was there – and he actually was surprised! So, he expected to be surprised, and unexpectedly, he was!

We get the idea as we read the reactions of people to Jesus that the same sort of thing was going on. They knew that the Messiah was coming. He was expected because God had let them “overhear” things through the prophets; a Messiah, or “deliverer” was coming. There were all sorts of details: the Messiah would bring justice and righteousness to the Earth and that the Messiah would “slay” the enemies of Israel. But there were some mysterious parts too, that maybe they did not like to pay too much attention to. The Messiah would suffer as it shows in Isaiah 53. There is also that passage in Daniel chapter 7 of the all-powerful judge before the throne of God who had the appearance as of a “Son of Man.” So, plenty of hints, but as we will see, that when Jesus came, the “Expected One” was not as expected. Despite all the clues, they were still surprised!

There were, at the time of Jesus coming, three differing religious ruling groups that had their own ideas of who the Messiah was. The first group

called the Pharisees, were only about 6,000 in number, an exclusive gentlemen’s club so to speak. They believed in a very strict interpretation of the Law of Moses and believed in all of the books of what we call the Old Testament – including the prophets. But how their religion was practiced was by strict observance of the law of God and all of the traditions that had sort of accreted like barnacles on the hull of a ship.

There was also a ruling class called the Sadducees that only believed in the first five books of the Bible: those books written by Moses that we call the Pentateuch (or five books). They also somehow did not believe in life after death, or spirits, or even people in heaven. And that is why they were sad, you see.

Then there was a group of men called “the Scribes.” They were lawyers of a sort, but their subject was religion. We see in the four Gospel narratives (Matthew, Mark Luke and John) that Jesus was frequently brought into conflict with the Pharisees and the Scribes and the Sadducees; he simply did not meet their various expectations of what and who the Messiah was supposed to be and do. He broke their grid.

In this chapter of Matthew, chapter 12 we are continuing to see various reactions to Jesus like we did in the last chapter. **When Jesus worked miracles and taught about who he was, how did the people respond? Did they believe or not believe?**

We saw last week in chapter 11 that even John the Baptist, the great prophet that pointed people to Jesus, was confused by Jesus. He sent messengers to ask him, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” Jesus reassured him by quoting scripture that he already knew about what the Messiah was going to be doing; things that Jesus was in fact doing.

The problem is that the various groups of leaders had developed their own expectations of the Messiah. They expected that the way of delivering the people was to be from their physical enemies, namely the Romans. So somehow Messiah was going to deliver them by conquering the Romans and establishing a glorious earthly kingdom. This is what they felt about the Kingdom of God coming to the earth; one that addressed their point of pain, their subjection to the Romans. Even his own disciples persisted in this belief after he was resurrected, in Acts chapter 1, they asked, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”

We will see in this chapter that even Jesus’ own family, and his mother, can't figure him out because he breaks all expectations.

Jesus worked miracles, he taught about himself and the scripture, he fulfilled all prophecies and even made new prophecies, but because the Pharisees and the Scribes and Sadducees were not willing to examine their wrong expectations, they were not willing to believe.

OUR CONDITION AS FALLEN PEOPLE

We can be slaves to our expectations; when they are not met, we are disappointed. Jesus teaches us to look to him and not be offended or disappointed but instead believe.

PROPOSITION

Jesus breaks expectations by showing that he is the Lord: greater than traditions, greater than the Sabbath, greater than Satan, greater than the Temple, greater than the Prophet Jonah and greater than death.

THE PLUCKING OF GRAIN

Chapter 12, verse 1,

¹ *At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat.* ² *But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, “Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath.”*

³ *He said to them, “Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, and those who were with him: ⁴ how he entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him to eat nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? ⁵ Or have you not read in the Law how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless?*

This month, we have been celebrating the reformation. This is when people saw the established church had drifted from the central truths of the Bible. The reformation was an effort by many people that tried to effect change in the church and in worship by grounding people in the truth of the Bible and not teachings of the church.

This is exactly what Jesus is doing. He is reforming by pulling them back to the teachings of the Bible instead of the teachings of the Pharisees and their traditions. This is Sola Scriptura in action; according to “scripture alone.” **Any appeal to the truth has to begin and end with the Bible.** The question is always, “what does the Bible teach about this subject?” Jesus said, “have you not read?” Of course, they had read it! But this is an appeal to the authority of the scripture over and against their man-made traditions.

The sabbath is important; it is one of the Ten Commandments,

Exodus 20:8–10a (ESV)

⁸ “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work...

Though we do not live any longer under the Mosaic Law, we need to fulfill the law through the Spirit. We need to give serious consideration to how to make the Lord’s Day holy.

It is one of the reasons that God punished Israel by sending them into exile after the Babylonians attacked them and carried away their nation,

2 Chronicles 36:20–21 (ESV)

²⁰ He took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and to his sons until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia, ²¹ to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.

So, the Pharisees were fanatical for a reason; they did not want God’s judgment to fall again. But in order to enforce the Sabbath they began to make rule after rule and imposed them upon the people. And their sinful hearts saw it as a way to exercise control over people, instead of helping them follow and worship God.

In the U.S., our Federal Tax code could be one sentence: “All American wage earners shall pay, once per year, ten percent of their income to the Federal government.” Instead, it is hundreds of thousands of pages and requires multiple legions of federal workers to try to enforce it.

Similarly, the Pharisees had burdened the people with rule upon rule. For example, in this case, the Pharisees are complaining that the disciples of

Jesus are doing what is not lawful by “working” on the Sabbath day. They were supposedly guilty of “reaping” by gathering grain, they were guilty of “threshing” by rubbing in their hands together to shuck the grain, they were guilty of “winnowing” by blowing the chaff off.

There were so many rules that the Pharisees had made up: If a man spit on the ground, and the spit rolled up and made a little furrow in the dirt, then he was guilty of “plowing.” If he carried an article of clothing from one room to another on the Sabbath, it was work; but not if he was wearing it. A man or woman could walk no more than one thousand yards on the Sabbath day.

So, the rules and traditions were piled high, and Jesus said, “No” “what does the scripture say or not say?” It says none of these things. Jesus says, that he is greater than the traditions and the temple that represented all religious duty, verse 6,

⁶ I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. ⁷ And if you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless. ⁸ For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.

You can almost hear the blood of the Pharisees coming to a boil; “How can this man claim to be greater than the Temple and greater than the Sabbath?”

THE HEALING ON THE SABBATH

Jesus continues to challenge their expectations, verse 9,

² He went on from there and entered their synagogue. ¹⁰ And a man was there with a withered hand. And they asked him, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” —so that they might accuse him.

According to the Pharisees, healing on the Sabbath was an example of working on the Sabbath and so they thought that they could trap Jesus. It seems ridiculous to our modern pragmatic minds. We are not “law” oriented; We are “do whatever we want” oriented, so this seems really strange to us.

I could hardly think of an example of something that people uniformly think is “wrong” in our modern society. I suppose the time when I ran red lights, stopping first to see if there was traffic, because my son Brett had cracked the side of his head and I decided to drive him straight to the hospital. I did what was not lawful, I ran red lights. The Bible says, “thou shalt not lie,” but if you were protecting Jews from the Nazi’s then it would be “right.” So, in verse 11,

*¹¹ He said to them, “Which one of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out? ¹² Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! **So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.**” ¹³ Then he said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” And the man stretched it out, and it was restored, healthy like the other.*

Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath? Absolutely, yes! There can be no law on doing good. Now if you can respect the Sabbath and do good another time, then do that too.

I used to be bothered in college when a professor would use “situational ethics” to justify tearing down the morals of a person or a law in society. An example is the abortion issue; should a woman have the right to abort in the case of rape or life of the mother? These situational ethics are designed to make a wrong “more right.” When Jesus uses them, they are designed to make a right, more right. **We cannot live only by rules; thinking is required in the Christian life! Most of all, listening to the Holy Spirit is required too!**

Jesus' healing the man on the Sabbath is exercising the reformation principle of Soli Deo Gloria – To God Alone be the Glory. You can be sure that healed man was worshiping and praising God that day!

But look at the strange reaction of the Pharisees in Verse 14,

¹⁴ But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him.

For the first time in the book of Matthew the hate of the Pharisees has boiled over to thoughts of murdering Jesus. **Where is the rejoicing with the man that was miraculously healed? Where is the acknowledgement that Jesus is exercising power that must come from God?** Their hatred is irrational and spiritual, it comes from the devil. Instead, because their place of prominence was challenged by Jesus, because they probably were embarrassed by their own stupidity, they got angry at Jesus and decided that he must be killed!

We all know what it is like to react wrongly. Someone might point out where we were wrong, and we get angry. Maybe another time, someone does something to us and we do something back, like a little child. We react wrongly, but if we are mature at all, we realize how stupid we were and apologize or confess our wrong to God. The Pharisees were not repenting of their wrong; it was a settled decision that Jesus was disrupting their little kingdom and he must die! Verse 15,

¹⁵ *Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from there. And many followed him, and he healed them all ¹⁶ and ordered them not to make him known. ¹⁷ This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah:*

¹⁸ *“Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. (Is 42).*

(This was of course fulfilled at Jesus baptism by John, God said from heaven, “This is my Son in whom I am well pleased” and the Holy Spirit descended upon him like a dove.) Continuing in verse 19,

- ¹⁹ *He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets;*
- ²⁰ *a bruised reed he will not break,*
- *and a smoldering wick he will not quench,*
- *until he brings justice to victory;*
- ²¹ *and in his name the Gentiles will hope.”*

When it says that Jesus will not cry out in the streets, it means that he will not act like a politician. He will not exploit people’s desires, say of being delivered from Rome, to further his popularity.

What is this about a bruised reed? Reeds were used for many things, like making quill pens or even a whistle for shepherds. A bruised reed was worthless and would be thrown out. It was easy just to get more reeds than mess with one that was squished.

The bruised reeds and smoldering wicks are metaphors for people; ones that are broken and weak, people that are no longer capable of making a sound by speaking up for themselves or those whose “light” is about to go out. Jesus says of himself, that he is gentle and humble in heart, a truly amazing quality of an almighty God! Last week we read this in Matthew 11,

²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

The Messiah rather than gathering an army, will advance the Kingdom of God by being gentle to broken people. **This broke their expectations!**

Jesus is saying that he is the only way to be saved. Keeping the law of God or trying to be a good person will not work; people were heavy laden and burdened beyond their strength in trying under the rules of the Pharisees. Jesus invites them to take his yoke that is easy. It's easy because we serve not rules and laws, but because we can instead love and be loyal to a person: Jesus Christ! Jesus is exemplifying "Sola Christus" - that we are saved by Christ alone!

Jesus has shown that he is Lord over tradition and Lord over the Sabbath and morally superior to the Pharisees. Now we will see that he is Lord over Satan.

V 22-37 LORD OVER SATAN

Verse 22,

²² Then a demon-oppressed man who was blind and mute was brought to him, and he healed him, so that the man spoke and saw. ²³ And all the people were amazed, and said, "Can this be the Son of David?"

²⁴ But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons." ²⁵ Knowing their thoughts, he said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. ²⁶ And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? ²⁸ But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

Jesus is being insulted. They are saying he is casting out demons by the power of Beelzebul (a derisive term meaning "Lord of the flies".) Where are hoards of flies? On a cow pie. They are saying that Jesus is Lord of the cow-pie.

But Jesus does not insult in return, verse 30,

³⁰ Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. ³¹ Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. ³² And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

Sometimes people ask, “Have I committed the unforgivable sin by blaspheming the Holy Spirit?” Jesus is saying that even rejecting the gospel and Christ is forgivable, because a person can still repent and turn back to Christ. But blaspheming the Holy Spirit means that one is completely rejecting the on-going testimony to a person that Jesus is the Christ. It is a settled rejection of what the Spirit is saying to them. In this case, it was attributing the work of the Spirit to Satan despite the irrefutable evidence.

The Pharisees were irrational and captured by Satan. As we also saw last week a person even cannot turn to God except that God himself does the work,

Matthew 11:27b (ESV)

²⁷ ... no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

Jesus is preaching to the Pharisees and scribes – repent! Change your minds; be careful how you think about me; make the right decision. We are saved by grace, that means that God alone has worked in our hearts to bring even the faith that we have. **This is Sola gratia in action;** we are saved by grace alone.

Ephesians 2:8–9 (ESV)

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Jesus breaks the expectations of the Pharisees and proves that he is from God and is over Satan by his miracles of healings. He does good, something Satan cannot do.

38-50 THE SIGN OF JONAH

³⁸ *Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, “Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.”* ³⁹ *But he answered them, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. ⁴⁰ For just as **Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.** ⁴¹ The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, **and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.**”*

Jesus is aware that even if he does a greater sign than Jonah, like rising from the dead, they still will not believe. If God re-arranged the stars of heaven to say, “Jesus is my son, believe in him.” People would still not believe. They would think of some pseudo-scientific explanation or a conspiracy theory. Jesus was not going to give more signs than he already had.

Jesus claimed to be greater than the prophet Jonah, a small claim for the Son of God, but one that was rejected by the Pharisees too. In verse 46 and following, we see that it is not just the Pharisees that have had their expectations broken. Even Jesus’ own family is surprised.

Verse 46,

⁴⁶ While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him.

We know this from Mark 3:21, ²¹ And when his family heard it, [all of these things that Jesus was doing right in this 12th chapter of Matthew] they went out to seize him, for they were saying, “He is out of his mind.”

Even his own family was not believing in Jesus. They would later come to believe after the resurrection... continuing in verse 48,

⁴⁸ But he replied to the man who told him, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” ⁴⁹ And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! ⁵⁰ For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

What is the will of God concerning his son Jesus? That we believe in him and seek rescue in him. Jesus is our hiding place. From what? From the righteous wrath of God against sin.

If you have not put your faith in Jesus and come to him believing, repenting of sin, you are exposed. It is as if you are standing on the beach during Hurricane Ian – you will be washed away.

When we say that we are saved by faith in Jesus, what are we saved from? We are saved from God to God. It is his will that each person come to repentance and faith in Christ, to flee to God in Jesus to escape the wrath of God.

It says in John 6,

John 6:40 (ESV)

⁴⁰ For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”

The only way to be saved is by putting our faith in Christ, this Sola Fide in action; by faith alone.

Jesus is surprising. He came to the earth and did not meet the expectations of the people or the ruling religious leaders. His plan was not what they had in mind. They crucified him and thus fulfilled God’s plan; that by faith in Jesus, people could be saved. What a surprise ending!

Acts 2:36–38 (ESV)

³⁶ Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” ³⁷ Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” ³⁸ And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus surprises us by his mercy and long-suffering with our sin and unbelief. Let’s come to him every day, confessing our sin, knowing that surprisingly, we are accepted in him.

Please pray with me.