

April 26, 2009

DECLARE YOUR LOYALTY!

MATTHEW 12.22-37

Through his ministry of healing exorcism, Jesus is inaugurating the kingdom of God by the power of the Spirit. Those who are loyal to this kingdom and those who are opposed to this kingdom are revealed in the declarations they make concerning the Spirit's kingdom-building project.

1. KINGDOM LOYALTIES ARE REVEALED IN OUR WORDS (22-32)

“Could this be the Son of David?” (22-23): A demonized man is brought to Jesus for healing. Much demonic activity in the gospels and a focus of Jesus' ministry (cf. 4.24; 8.16; 8.28-34; 9.32-34; 15.22-28; 17.14-18).

Demonic activity indicates a problem in the house of Israel (cf. 10.6; 15.24; also 12.43-45).

Demonization manifest in blindness (i.e. inability to make judgments) and muteness (i.e. inability to offer up the proper fruit of the lips; cf. Heb 13.15). Cp. 9.32-34; three men there, one in our passage.

“Crowds/Multitudes” = major character in Mt. Fickle; cf. 7.28-29; 21.1ff.; 27.15-26.

“This couldn't be the son of David, could it?” Expects a negative answer. But what would provoke the question?

Note the concern of Mt's Gospel in 1.1. Promise in Ez 34 & 37 that David would reign over united Israel.

Story of David in 1Sam 16. Anointed king (but not yet enthroned), then commissioned to perform exorcism for the present king.

Once the demons are driven out completely when Saul is finally dethroned, then the Son of David will build a house for YHWH's name and his kingdom will be established forever as the Son of God (2Sam 7).

Jesus is anointed by the Spirit in baptism (ch. 3). Jesus will drive out the demons and establish the kingdom that will last forever. He has been declared to be God's Son in his baptism and will be declared to be God's Son in his resurrection. He is the King.

Kingdom is established through gentle, healing ministry.

Every kingdom divided against itself is ruined (24-27): If Jesus is the Son of David, Israel owes him loyalty and must follow his plan for the establishment of the kingdom. They refuse.

Beelzebub/Beelzebul = the prince of demons = Satan (cp. 9.27-34). Probably originally meant “lord of the house.” Adjusted to mean “lord of dung/flyes.”

To manifestly align yourself with sorcery would be to call a death sentence upon yourself in Israel (cf. 12.14).

If Jesus is casting out Satan by the power of Satan, then he is still defeating Satan. If Satan's house is divided and the soldiers of his army are killing one another, then his kingdom will be decimated.

“By whom do the sons/disciples cast them out?” Argument seems to go something like this: if exorcisms are performed by the power of Satan and your own disciples are performing them, then you are condemning your own disciples. Ultimately they are condemning themselves.

Plundering the strong man (28-30): If Jesus is right, he doesn't just win the argument. If Jesus is right, then he is truly the Son of David and they need to pledge their loyalty to him.

If Jesus casts out demons by the Spirit of God, that means that the kingdom of God has come upon them. Kingdom of God = God's manifested rule in the world. It is the time, as Mt alludes to in this last section, when justice would be sent forth to victory (12.20) and all the nations would come into the house of YHWH and trust in Israel's God (12.21; cf. Isa 42.1-4).

The kingdom of God is the time when God sets up his Son to be ruler of the nations and put down rebellion (Ps 2). This ultimately means the casting out of Satan and taking the kingdom that rightfully belongs to Man.

Must bind the strong man so that you can plunder/spoil him. Ref. to the defeat of Pharaoh and Egypt. Defeat and spoil the Egyptians and then go and build God's house.

Since in the Person and work of Jesus the kingdom of God is made manifest, this is a call for absolute loyalty to him (12.30).

The unforgivable sin (31-32): "Therefore" draws a conclusion. These statements should not be held in isolation from the context.

"Blasphemy" = a sin of speech. It speaks of slander or words of bitter opposition. It can refer simply to saying horrible things to people, but it can go beyond that as well. Words become "decrees" for persecution and death.

Sin and blasphemy against the Son of Man will be forgiven. This happens at the cross (Lk 23.34). This forgiveness is a 40 year reprieve from punishment and an opportunity to repent. (Forgiveness = withholding punishment see Ps 78.38).

After Jesus dies and rises again, he sends the Spirit to form his church, his bride. Jesus' church, the Spirit-formed community, will call Israel to repentance for crucifying Jesus (something that Peter does on the Day of Pentecost and afterwards).

Israel refuses to repent in the space of this forty years. Instead, they issue decrees (i.e., words) by the hand of people like Saul to go and take Christians captive and put them to death (cf. e.g., Ac 9.1-2). They reject the second witness and God will no longer withhold punishment.

"This age" and "the age to come" speak about the time before and after the resurrection. Jesus fully inaugurated "the age to come" in his resurrection.

The unpardonable sin is first and foremost Israel's rejection of the work of the Spirit in the church. Their sin is what the Scriptures would call a high-handed sin. They know who Jesus is. They know that his church is that promised Spirit people of God. Yet they stand in opposition to it anyway.

It still remains unpardonable to resist the gospel witness of the church throughout the ages. You will not be forgiven if you high-handedly reject the gospel witness of the church and refuse to join her in her mission.

2. WE WILL BE JUSTIFIED OR CONDEMNED BY OUR WORDS (33-37)

The fruit reveals the nature of the tree (33-35): Fruit = words. They speak evil words because their hearts are evil.

"Children of vipers." Cf. Ps 140.3; they are children of *the* serpent.

Words will be the criterion of judgment (36-37): "Idle" or "careless" words are words that do not appropriately or righteously build up *OR* tear down. They serve no good purpose.

Not merely a matter of "kindness" (although it may be involved). It is a matter of *purpose*.

Justified or condemned by your words. Your words will be the measure of judgment at the throne of God on the last day.

The fruit of your lips, reveal who you are and where your loyalties lie. Or, to put it another way, the object of your faith is revealed in how you speak. To whom are you loyal? In whom do you trust? What you say will reveal the content of your faith.

At the last judgment your words will either be the means of your justification (acquittal) before God's judgment or your condemnation. Again, please don't try to explain this away by saying, "Jesus is talking about something different than Paul." He is not.

What is your confession? Is it "Jesus is Lord?" If so, do the other "declarations" of your life line up with that confession?

1. *Those who oppose Christ's church will not be forgiven.*

2. *What we say reveals our hearts.*

3. *We will give account for our words.*