

# Matthew 12:22-45

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[0:00] So, we're still in Matthew 12. This is a very emotive chapter for all sorts of reasons. And we have come to verse 12, sorry, verse 22. And it's a bit ambitious, but I'm hoping we'll get to verse 45 this morning.

And if we don't, I'll pick it up next week. Because the subject matter is important, so I don't want to skip it. At the same time, I don't want to spend weeks and weeks repeating myself. So, those of you who come on a Thursday will have already studied some of what we're going to study this morning.

But there will be a little bit of extra. So, if we turn to Matthew 12. And mostly, I'm not going to put notes on the screen. Because actually, they can serve as a distraction.

But I am going to put up one slide in a moment. So, Matthew chapter 12. And you may recall last week, when we dealt with the passage from, I think it was 15 to 21.

Or we did 14 again, didn't we? So, it's 14 to 21. And we worked out that in that passage, that this chapter is a real hinge point in the ministry of Jesus.

[1:19] It's a point at which there is a very sudden change. And if I go forward to, and you can have these notes, by the way. But if I go forward to that slide, up to chapter 12, you have got Jesus' focus on the nation.

He is demonstrating to the nation. And for 12 chapters, we've had Matthew talk about that. We've talked about his bloodline. We've talked about the virgin birth. We've talked about the forerunner, John the Baptist.

He's demonstrated scriptural miracles that were prophesied that he would do. And he's done the lot. I mean, apart from the one he's about to do.

And there's the raising of Lazarus to come. And he had already raised the dead, but not quite so publicly as he did with Lazarus. So, he's doing the miracles that the scriptures told the Jews to expect.

He's saying the things that the scripture said he would say. He came at the time when the scripture told them he would come. He's fulfilled everything over and over and over.

[2:24] And he's reached this point that we're about to start to study where the Jews as a nation commit the unforgivable sin. So, this first 12 chapters, he was focusing on the nation.

He was proving himself to the nation. And he was making an offer of the kingdom. He was saying, if you accept me, your king, you will receive the kingdom. And the first and the leaders into the kingdom was always going to be the Jewish nation.

And it still will be the Jewish nation, but that has had to be postponed. Because in his first coming, they rejected him. In his second coming, they won't. In his second coming, they will fulfill the prophecy that you can read in Malachi chapter 12.

I think it's verse 9 or 10, where it says, They will look upon me whom they have pierced and mourn for him as for an only son. And so, there will be a time in future history where the remaining people in Israel are believers.

And all Israel will be saved. That is a time yet future. But God has not changed his plan. He simply postponed the outcome because of their response. Up to now, he's always taught by discourse.

[3:39] Simple, plain, straightforward teaching. Not parables. From this point on, you will find that he teaches in parables. And the interim plan, which is the church, the interim plan between his first coming and his second coming, how is the word of God going to be conveyed through the world during that period of time between the two comings, in other words, the church, doesn't get a mention in the first 12 chapters.

But we start to see mentions on it. It becomes prominent in the last 13 to 28. I can't do the maths in my head. That number of chapters. 15 chapters.

So, we are now at the point that sparks all this change. And it's a critical change for the Jews. And it also allows us to answer some questions because there are people who say, well, I wonder if I've ever committed the unforgivable sin. And I think we might answer that today.

But I'll let you be the judge. What exactly is the unforgivable sin? Because it's all very well to trot out. Well, it's blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

[ 4 : 58 ] What does that mean? So, hopefully, we'll clarify some of those things today. Let's read then. Chapter 12. And I, did I say 21 onwards?

It's 22 onwards anyway. 22. So, then a demon-possessed man, who was blind and mute, was brought to Jesus. And he healed him so that the mute man spoke and saw.

All the crowds were amazed and were saying, this man cannot be the son of David, can he? But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, this man casts out demons only by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons.

And knowing their thoughts, Jesus said to them, any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste. And any city or house divided against itself will not stand.

If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? If I by Beelzebul cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out?

[ 5 : 57 ] For this reason, they will be your judges. But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can anyone enter the strong man's house and carry off his property unless he first binds the strong man and then he will plunder his house?

And I'm going to pause there just because this is quite a long passage and I think bits might get lost along the way. So they're saying he's casting out demons by the power of Beelzebul, the chief of demons.

And his response is, a house that's divided against itself cannot stand. And what he's meaning by this is if Satan casts out Satan, or to put it another way, if I'm carrying out this work by the power of Satan, I'm undoing the work of Satan.

So Satan's house is going to fall because I'm actually undermining his work. And he says any house divided against itself cannot stand.

But he's making the point of the fact that you can know this is not Satan because I'm destroying the works of Satan. And then he goes on and says, if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

[ 7 : 28 ] So you have the offer of the kingdom being brought to the fore yet again. It's not being brought as an offer this time, but it's being brought forward as a statement. If I'm doing this by the power of God, and in Greek there's an if and it's not, and there's an if and it's so.

And this is, if I'm, if and I am doing it by the power of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. This kingdom I've been talking about all this time is now yours if it wasn't for what you've just done.

And then verse 29, how can anyone enter the strong man's house and carry off his property unless he first binds the strong man?

And then he will plunder this house. So what Jesus is saying is, I'm the strong man, sorry, I'm the one who can overcome the strong man. The strong man of the house of Satan is Satan.

And the only way I can plunder Satan's house is to be stronger than him. To be able to tie him up and stick him in the corner where he can't do any harm and destroy the work that he's done.

[ 8 : 37 ] He's making a clear statement that he's superior in strength and power and authority to Satan. And I can't get through this passage without thinking, they knew this.

This is a willful casting aside. They are, they've said he's doing it by the power of Satan, thinking that that will disarm him in front of the crowds. And allow them to bring their point that Jesus is not who he's claiming to be.

But in fact, they did the reverse because Jesus comes back with perfect logic to destroy any such notion. Verse 30, and we'll read through to verse 37.

He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters. Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven people, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven.

Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him. But whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.

[ 9 : 47 ] Either make the tree fruit and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad. For the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers, I love his diplomacy.

You brood of vipers, how can you being evil speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good, and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil.

But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an account for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.

Now this, first of all, the so-called unforgivable sin, and I use the word so-called because as I was studying for this, I realised that there have been more than one unforgivable sin in the length of humanity.

They are rare, but they are there. In Kadesh Barnea, when they didn't do what the Lord wanted them to do, they didn't trust him, and they didn't enter the land because of the giants, the whole of that generation was denied access.

[ 11 : 06 ] And there was that point that came at Kadesh Barnea where judgment became inescapable. Right, you're in the wilderness and you're wandering, and none of this generation will enter the land.

You've blown it, and you cannot get it back. And the result we know was that the only two people that entered the land were Joshua and Caleb, who didn't enter into the will of the people.

They didn't follow the narrative of the people and the narrative of the leaders. They stood and said, no, this is God's word that we can enter the land. And so had they been allowed to have their way, they would have entered the land and not spent all that time wandering.

So there was this sin that was not forgiven for that generation. A similar thing happened during the reign of Manasseh, the most evil king, it is said, certainly up to the date when he lived, he was the most evil king that lived during the history of Israel.

And under his reign, they were sacrificing babies to Molech and doing all sorts of crazy stuff. And there came a point when he said, Israel will be judged. And that judgment became inescapable.

[ 12 : 27 ] Inescapable. Now, there was a stay of execution during the reign of Josiah. And Josiah arrived on the throne and he was a godly man and he reinstated the word of God and he reinstated the sacrifices and particularly the Sabbath.

And he set the word of God back in the temple and reinstated daily readings from the word of God.

And he turned the whole country around in favour of God for, I think it was 32 years he reigned for. But at the end of that 32 years, judgment still fell and they went into the Babylonian captivity. So the generation that committed the original sin under Manasseh, they were still judged because judgment was given and it was made clear that that judgment was inescapable and inevitable.

Which brings me to an interesting point. Because this unforgivable sin falls into a similar category. In that you've got all these people who are listening to these leaders who are saying he's casting out demons by Beelzebul. And what the majority of the people did was say, oh well, we'll go with the leaders.

[ 13 : 52 ] Which is something that Jews have traditionally done. And in fact, I was, I realised they still do the same today. And one of us on Thursday night brought up the fact that Ben Shapiro had done exactly this during the TV thing that he'd done.

Where somebody had, I think it might have been John MacArthur, but somebody had spoken to him about Jesus as the Messiah. And Ben Shapiro had said, well, if Jesus is the Messiah, how come that none of the rabbis agree with that?

And so they're still hanging on the words. 2,000 years later, they're still hanging on the words of the rabbis to establish whether Jesus was or was not the Messiah. But they all have a choice.

They can all study this for themselves. They don't have to follow those leaders. Just like the ones at Kadesh Barnea didn't have to. They didn't have to go with the crowd.

You know, Joshua and Caleb didn't. And others didn't have to. They didn't. They could have been. They could have been Joshua and Caleb and some others.

[ 15 : 04 ] Couldn't they? But there weren't. So it's not that the sin was judged as an individual sin.

It was a national sin. It was a generational sin. But not everybody in that generation had to go along with it. That's what I'm trying to bring out of this.

So if we come back to Matthew 12, they were in this situation where they were saying, surely this can't be the son of David, can it? And why would they say that?

Well, they said it because they'd always been taught that when somebody turned up and healed a man with a mute spirit, that was Messiah. That was the traditional rabbinic teaching.

There were three miracles that were above all other miracles. They were counted as messianic. Only Messiah would do them. The first was the cleansing of a Jewish leper.

[16:03] And Jesus did that. And if you recall, they sent it. I've got scripture references in the notes, but I'm trying to do this without filling the screen with notes.

If you recall, when the Jewish leper was cleansed, he was told, go and show yourself to the priests. And they'd had this law lying in their books for millennia.

And they'd never used it because they'd never had a Jewish leper turn up and say, excuse me, I've just been cleansed. And there was a ritual that lasted about a week they had to go through if one presented himself.

And it had never happened until Jesus said to this leper, go and present yourself to the priests. And when they still denied, this is the bit that gives me a bit of a giggle.

When they denied that he was Messiah after that, he sent them 10. Which is kind of what you want to do, isn't it? When you're trying to take away the defense of the opposition.

[17:15] But he did that and we know he did that. The other one was the healing of a man born blind because it had never been known in Israel. It had been known for people to get better from blindness that had somehow come upon them during their life.

But for someone who was born blind, that had never been known. There is a question mark. And you read this miracle in John chapter 9. There's a question mark as to whether that blind man had been born simply blind or whether he'd been born without eyes.

And I'm not going to enter into the scholarly discussions on that because actually they just make you go in circles. But either way, he'd been born blind and Jesus healed him.

And the uproar that took place when he did that. And you've got to remember that the people who were causing the uproar were the ones who had taught that if a man turns up and does this, that's Messiah.

And what they did, if you recall the story in John 9, they persecuted the poor guy who got healed.

And he had finished up being cast out of the synagogue for getting healed from his blindness.

Absolute lunacy.

[18:25] But it disturbed their narrative. It reminds me very much of politics today. You can't speak against the narrative, especially if what you're saying is true. And so now you've got this miracle, which is the other one, the healing of the man with the mute spirit.

And the reason they said that was a messianic miracle, only Messiah can do this, was because when you cast out, when you're a Jew and you're carrying out an exorcism, the rabbinical tradition was that you engage with the spirit, you speak to the spirit and you elicit the spirit's name.

And you receive the name from the person using their voice. And of course, you can't do that with someone who's dumb. So they could never cast out this spirit.

You notice if you quickly turn to, I think it's Mark 5, you will notice Jesus using the very self-same method. So you've got the Gerasene demoniac, or some of your versions will say the Gadarene demoniac.

And in verses 8 and 9, this is just part of the exorcism, come out of the man you unclean spirit, and he was asking him, what is your name? And he said to him, my name is Legion, for we are many.

[20:04] And he began to implore him earnestly not to send them out of the country. And then you know the demons get cast into the swine. But the point was Jesus there was using a typical rabbinical method of exorcism.

It's the common way. It seems crazy in our generation to have a common way of exorcism.

Although there are many churches that try to make you believe that that's what they do.

I've yet to come across one in which it's genuine. That's not to say I think it can't be done, because the Lord can do what the Lord wants. But it's often used as a way of convincing you that the miraculous is going on when that's often questionable.

So, he had already done this in Matthew chapter 9. If you turn back to Matthew 9.

Matthew 9. I'm struggling to remember the verse.

[ 21 : 15 ] 32. Yes. I just got there the same time as you did. Matthew 9 verse 32. So, as they were going out, a mute demon possessed man was brought to him. And after the demon was cast out, the mute man spoke and the crowds were amazed and were saying, nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel.

But the Pharisees were saying, he cast out demons by the ruler of demons. So, they'd done it once before and got away with it. Jesus had been gracious. Although, in this particular case, I don't know. I can't justify what I'm about to say, but it somehow seems a little bit lower key. I don't know why I say that, but it doesn't seem like it was quite such a crowd and it doesn't seem like it was quite such a big event as the one we're reading about in chapter 12.

But nevertheless, they'd already decided that he was casting out demons by the ruler of demons. And they seem to have got away with it. But in chapter 12, he says, in verse 32, whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man shall be forgiven.

But whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come. So, the sin was to speak against the Holy Spirit.

[ 22 : 43 ] The sin of blasphemy, the Greek word blasphemia, means to vilify or speak evil against. And so, the Holy Spirit who empowered Jesus' ministry has, first of all, the Holy Spirit is God.

And therefore, God is good and is also righteous and true. And so, when he speaks against the Holy Spirit and says that Satan is empowering this ministry that is actually truthful and good, what we get from that is that Jesus says this is absolutely evil and it's unforgivable.

So, I think we'll read some more of the chapter before we talk about whether we can commit the unforgivable sin today.

Because that's an interesting one for us to think about. As I know, I know there are at least some in our midst who've wondered, have I managed to commit the unforgivable sin along the way?

Before we read, I will say that if you're worried about it, you haven't. Like, the fact that you're worrying about it means you haven't. But, before we read on, let's just finish these verses down to verse 37.

[ 24 : 07 ] One of the things he says is, your mouth is going to speak out of that which fills your heart. And to this group of Pharisees, he says, you brood of vipers, how can any of you come up with anything good when your hearts are so evil?

And that when you speak careless words, you will give an account for careless words in the day of judgment.

Now, I praise God for his salvation because over the years I've said many things that I wish I could go and take back. But, I think there's a point of application in those verses for us, which is, that I want to encourage us to continually pray that God will fill our hearts with the right things to say.

I want to be found, and I'm a long way from it. It takes surprisingly little to make me run off at the mouth and say things I shouldn't. But I want to be in a place one day where when my mouth speaks, what comes out of my heart through my mouth is God's word.

And the more I can get to that point, the happier I will be. But the truth is, I'm a mixture, and we all are a mixture, of the old sinful self and the new creation in Christ.

[ 25 : 45 ] And there are times when we stoically remain righteous in the face of immense opposition, and there are other times when at the least bit of, you know, somebody carves you up on the road or something like that. You can return to the old sinful self and your mouth spews out vile stuff.

And the trigger point seems to be in a different place for all of us, but it seems to still be there for all of us. So I want to encourage us to pray that our hearts will be so full of God's word that when we speak, that's what comes out.

The spirit of God is unleashed when we speak. So let's move on. Verse 38. And I think this gets to the nub of something, this next passage.

Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to him, Teacher, we want to see a sign from you. But he answered and said to them, An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign, and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet.

For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah.

[ 27 : 03 ] And behold, something greater than Jonah is here. The queen of the south will rise up with this generation at the judgment and will condemn it because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon.

And behold, something greater than Solomon is here. Just pause there for a moment. So, first of all, they're asking him for a sign.

He's done nothing but signs for the best part of three years. Oh, but if we could see a sign from you, he's fulfilled every scripture sign that was promised.

The possible exception of the resurrection. But he's fulfilled the Old Testament in spades.

Oh, but we want a sign from you. And he goes on and says this, an evil and adulterous generation.

And if you're one of these people that scribbles in your Bible, underline generation here.

[ 28 : 09 ] Because he's levying his ire against a generation, not at an individual. And I think we should take a lot of comfort from this because as we read on down, we'll find that on two other occasions, this generation gets a mention.

And the generation is what has committed this sin in a unique situation. So you have the unique situation where Jesus is in their midst.

If you remember me talking about our fortiori arguments, arguing from the lesser to the greater or from the greater to the lesser, he goes on and says, Nineveh's going to stand up and condemn you. And someone here is greater than Nineveh. The queen of the south is going to condemn you. And there is someone here who's greater than Solomon. What he does in referring to these previous generations, if I had to try to sum it up, it would be this.

They've got less light than you have. Or they had less light than you had. They didn't have so much of God's word. They didn't have Messiah in their midst.

[ 29 : 27 ] They didn't have the benefit of seeing hundreds of fulfilled prophecies. They were far at disadvantage, and yet they repented.

Or the queen of Sheba recognised that this was God's wisdom. And you lot, you had all the light, and you had all the word, and you had all the miracles, and you still said no.

So, it reminds me of times in scripture when God's wrath has been unleashed because there was nowhere else to go.

And one of those was in Genesis where he sent the flood. It says, God repented that he made man because he did nothing but evil and had nothing but evil in his heart.

So, he's pointing out that a generation has come to this point. Now, in Acts chapter 2, verse 40, Peter says, Peter says, save yourselves from this perverse generation.

[ 30 : 35 ] So, the generation that committed this sin, the members of that generation could still save themselves from the perverse generation if they would turn to Christ.

And of course, 3,000 of them did on the day of Pentecost. And I think another couple of thousand, what seems to be the next day, I'm not sure if it was, but, in the very early days of the early church, which was predominantly Jewish, 5,000 people at least, saved themselves from this perverse generation.

But when he speaks to the perverse generation, accepting that those who have been individually saved have been taken out of that generation, their fate is sealed.

And of course, we see the fulfilment of that in AD 70, when the whole of Jerusalem was sacked, burnt to the ground, people starved, people committed cannibalism, and so on.

It was a dreadful, dreadful, dreadful time. But God provided a way out for those who'd saved themselves for this wicked and perverse generation. And if we were to read in the history of Eusebius, we'll find that God spoke prophetically to his people who were listening, who were saved, and gave them an instruction to leave and go to this city called Pella.

[ 31 : 56 ] And so when Rome put a barrier around that area so that they couldn't escape, and then over a period of time totally destroyed them in the most foul way, and then burnt the temple to the ground, that those who had absented themselves from the wicked and perverse generation were relieved.

Where did I stop? Verse 43. Now when the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places, seeking rest, and does not find it.

Then it says, I will return to my house from which I came. And when it comes, it finds it unoccupied, swept, and put in order. Then it goes, and it takes along with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself.

And they go in and live there, and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. This is the way it will also be with this evil generation. Now one of the people who will, I haven't got his quote on the screen this morning because it's quite a long quote, and I was convinced I'd run out of time before I got here.

Arnold Fruchtenbaum makes this point, and I think it's undeniable from what we've read, that the unforgivable sin was firstly in a unique circumstance, and secondly, was the sin of a generation, not an individual.

[ 33 : 27 ] So I don't think an individual can commit this sin if they are saved. That said, what they did, and all those people that aligned themselves with that generation did, was they rejected Messiah.

And if you think about it, the unforgivable sin today is to reject Messiah. If you get to the point of your death and you have not trusted in Jesus, you are doomed.

So the unforgivable sin remains the same, really, but it can't be committed by a saved individual because they've already accepted and trusted in Messiah.

Now that, that's my assessment of it. I realise that that's a contentious statement and it's a contentious subject. And I'm happy to debate it with anyone, probably not here this morning, but I'm happy to debate it with anyone.

But that's my take on it, supported by, I don't know whether I took his or he took mine, but Arnold Fruchtenbaum agrees with me. I think you took the commitment.

[ 34 : 38 ] I've been sussed. But the point here is we shouldn't worry whether we've committed the unforgivable sin or even whether we can because it wasn't an individual sin, it was a generational sin.

Now we do live in a generation where the majority of them are committing the same sin in that they are rejecting Messiah. We haven't rejected Messiah.

We might have struggled with sins, but they're not unforgivable. They might undermine our position with God.

They might even bring down God's judgment on our heads because we are stubbornly refusing to repent. That could be up to and including the taking away of our physical life, but our place in heaven is not affected by that.

That's my take on it. And I think that's me done for this morning, but Lord, thank you for this word and for the fact that we now get to read for the rest of Matthew's Gospel about what you did to establish your church.

[ 35 : 56 ] And how you changed your ministry. And we're going to find even before the end of this chapter that you started to teach in parables, which is an indication of the change that we see up on the board.

Thank you, Lord, that you didn't put an end to it all at that point, but you still gave the rest of the world an opportunity to hear the Gospel and respond. And Lord, we do pray for your people Israel as we all sense we are getting so much closer to the time of the Great Tribulation, the time of the rapture of the church.

As we get closer to these end things, Lord, we pray that your people will be sustained and will rediscover you. We know from your word that there will be carnage in those end times and many, many of your elect race, elect nation, will die.

But we also know that there will be a point when all Israel is saved and that your word will be fulfilled. And the unfolding of that fills us with both excitement and terror.

But we do pray, Lord, that your name will be glorified and magnified on this earth by the way you deal with your people in these end times. In Jesus' name.

[ 37 : 19 ] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.