

The Danger of a Hard Heart

Matthew 12:22-37

Introduction

Back in Black: The Pharisees are back, again. They can't seem to learn their lesson. The Bills lost to Giants in Superbowl XXV (1990) with a missed field goal. They then lost to the Redskins (1991) and the Cowboys (1992-93). The acronym B-I-L-L-S (Boy I Love Losing Super Bowls). They were glutton for punishments, they kept coming back for more. The Pharisees keep coming back for more. They may have lost every theological debate, every rhetorical skirmish. They might be wrong but they're not quitters.

- Despair.com, "Give Up: At some point, hanging in there just makes you look like an even bigger loser." "Never Give Up: Never stop trying to exceed your limits. We need the entertainment."
- Flat Earth Rocket man "Mad Mike" died in his steam powered rocket (get a job at Space X instead of building a Looney Tunes DIY rocket in your backyard).
- No one likes a quitter, but sometimes there is wisdom to realizing and accurately assessing a situation (e.g., Anthony Smith vs. Glover Teixeira, no strikes landed in Round three, teeth falling out in round four).

Refuse to Lose: Maybe it is bad. There is wisdom in surrender especially when you are fighting God! No one likes a quitter, but sometimes there is wisdom to realizing and accurately assessing a situation (e.g., Anthony Smith vs. Glover Teixeira, no strikes landed in Round three, teeth falling out in round four). My prayer for this "opposing Jesus" series is that you and I would stop fighting God and surrender everything to him. Submit! Give in! The worst thing you can do is double down in opposition to Jesus. **The Pharisees show the danger of hardening their hearts to God.**

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? ²⁷ And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. ²⁸ But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. ²⁹ Or how can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house. 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. ³³ "Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its

fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. ³⁴ You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. ³⁵ The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. ³⁶ I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, ³⁷ for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”

1. When Your Thoughts Condemn You (vv. 22-32)

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? ²⁷ And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. ²⁸ But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. ²⁹ Or how can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house. 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.

Situation: 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?” Jesus continues in his mission of bringing the KoG, fulfilling the promise bring the dead to life, to make the sad happy, to reverse the curse of sin and death. He demonstrates his identity, authority, and mission often through healing (we’ve seen this throughout Matthew).

- Notice the man’s **symptoms** (blind + mute) are **reversed** (saw + spoke). (1) Evidence of healing. (2) Witnesses to healing. (3) Demonstration of “reverse the curse.” (4) Specific prophetic fulfillment (“I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness, Is 42:6-7).
- Notice the **cause** of the symptoms: **demon-oppression**. *Make a mental note* This is important and will play an important role in the ensuing discussion.

Situation: ²³ And all the people were amazed, and said, “Can this be the Son of David?” The response of the crowd was, **rightly**, amazement! They are beginning to get the point (slow learners) that Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior, the King. The fact that they get it only further

angers the Pharisees. The Lightbulb is starting to go off in the minds of the people (but definitely not a “flick” on but a slow dimming).

Calling Good Evil: ²⁴ But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, “It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons.” The Pharisees rather than **rejoice** at the healing of the this man, rather than **consider** Jesus is who he said he is, they **double-down** in their rejection and say that he must be casting out this demon by the power of Beelzebul (i.e., Satan). Jesus has “[solved] their hardest riddles, [surpassed] their highest standards, [exceeded] their [legal] discernment” but they still refuse to admit he is the promised Messiah. Rather than submit to the authority of Jesus, they would rather call the power of God Satanic.

- Do we call evil “good” and good “evil”?
 - Abortion (two things can be wrong) but, for real, how have we gotten to the point where killing an innocent child is deemed a social good.
 - When we reject God we run the risk of seeing his good commands as evil. His justice becomes oppression, his patience becomes exasperation, his refinement is seen as wickedness. Rather than trust God we accuse him of evil.
- “No one escapes this broken world unbroken.” The challenge is to see with eyes of hope and trust God’s goodness when we can’t quite understand how it all works together.

Thoughts: ²⁵ Knowing their thoughts, he said to them, Maybe they were muttering off to the side (I could learn a lot in youth group by just standing on the side and listening). But they thought they couldn’t be heard. And they couldn’t, but Jesus **knew their thoughts**. And their thoughts condemned them.

- This is why the good behavior of the Pharisees wasn’t enough. First, it often wasn’t good. Second, God doesn’t just judge our actions, he judges our hearts. He sees our intentions. He knows our ulterior motives.
- Stop playing the game with God, you can fool him. Part of redemption is confession, coming clean, admitting what **God already knows**. When we “fake it” we are not fooling God, in fact, we are often only fooling ourselves.
- It’s very possible, tonight, that the person you need to be honest with most is yourself.
 - Are you being honest about your fears, doubts, anger, frustration, sin?
 - “How can you draw close to God when you are far from your own self?” (Augustine).

(1) Satan Wouldn’t Fight Himself: “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? Satan is too smart to use his own power against his own kingdom. Satan wouldn’t fight himself. Satan isn’t in charge and he has no power but **he isn’t dumb**. Satan knows how to trick you. He accuses us with “plausible” lies (i.e., the devil is a liar, his native language is lies, Jn 8:44), he sneaks into our churches with friends. He disguises wickedness with beautiful package (e.g., the prince of darkness is an angel of light). He’s a trickster, he’s clever: “Indeed the safest road to Hell is the gradual

one—the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts” (C. S. Lewis, *Screwtape*).

- He is smart enough to trick you and not dumb enough to fight himself.
- How can Jesus be casting out “Satan” (i.e., demons) by the power of Satan.
- Pharisees are grasping at straws. But *sin makes us stupid*. Our rebellion makes us justify our disobedience with all sorts of illogical and fanciful reasons. “Suspicion often creates what it suspects” (Lewis, *Screwtape*).

(2) If I’m Team Satan, So Are You: ²⁷ And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. ²⁸ But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Apparently, divine exorcisms were not completely unheard of, yet the Pharisees didn’t have a problem with their co-religionists casting out demons. If they are working according to the power God, then why should Jesus’ work be any more problematic?

- However, his work is more problematic. It comes with a different level of power and authority because Jesus is healing by the Spirit of God.
- Here’s the point: Jesus’ healing ministry is evidence that the Kingdom of God is here. This should be a joyous moment! But it is only joy to those who embrace the king who has come. The KoG is a threat to those (i.e., the Pharisees) who oppose it.
 - When two people are in a dispute and threaten to call the police (some are bluffing; others are serious). The person in the wrong sees the arrival of the police as bad; the person in the right sees the arrival of the police as good.

(3) I’ve Proved I’ve Beat Up Satan: ²⁹ Or how can someone enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house. With all of that, Jesus has proved his prowess by binding Satan. Jesus has tied up Satan. They both can’t be operative at the same time (e.g., this isn’t Star Wars, “balance to the force, Yin and Yang, etc.). One who is stronger than Satan is here!

- The Pharisees have come at Jesus with unreasonable, illogical accusations. They are no longer denying the *power* of Jesus, but trying to say his power is demonic. Their accusation is patently ridiculous. Satan wouldn’t fight himself. They don’t accuse anyone else of Satanic activity, they are just trying to avoid submitting to the authority of Jesus. All they’ve succeeded in doing is **drawing a line in the sand**.

Dividing Line: ³⁰ Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. The Pharisees, in their opposition, have stumbled on a truth of discipleship. When it comes to Jesus, you are either with him or against him. When confronted with the claims of Jesus, the demonstration of his authority, you can either ignore, oppose, or accept Jesus.

- We don’t like ultimatums, we like a little Jesus sprinkled into our worldly desires. We want to “have our cake and eat it too.” But, at the end of the day you can only have one ruler of your life. You can be involved in lots of things and have a lot of hobbies but you can only have one master. Only one thing can have ownership of your life! You are devoted to the master you serve.

- “There are so many people who are leaving Christianity because they have found that denying their desires for God's sake is too difficult. But by all accounts, the Bible tells us that this would be the case.” Here’s a truth, “(1) The more I'm one-foot-in and one-foot-out, the less joy I have and the more discontentment. (2) The more all-in I am, the harder life is but the more joy I have.” (Nolette).

No Neutral: Neutrality toward Jesus might be one of the greatest tricks of Satan. I can think positively toward Jesus as a good teacher or moral leader but not follow him (you clearly don't agree with his morality or his teachings). Or I can worship Jesus with a little bit of my life. “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money” (Matt 6:24).

- You cannot serve both God and _____? Devil? Evil? *Money*. The #1 competition for my heart is my stuff. It's not somebody, it's my money and my stuff. My time, love and attention are dominated by my stuff. We have to surrender *everything*, especially our stuff to Jesus.
- What is the in the blank of your life? You cannot serve God and _____? Job, reputation, money, anxiety, personality, temptations, etc.
- “The master to whom you pay allegiance clearly indicates the kingdom you advance.”
- Neutrality toward Jesus is impossible. You are either with him or against him.

Example of Pilate: Think about Pilate in a passage like John 18. He was caught between the crowd who wanted to crucify Jesus and the obvious innocence of Jesus. If he frees Jesus (like he should) it would have the crowd angry at him and it would destroy his political power. If he crucified Jesus he would be killing an innocent man. Pilate tries to tread the middle ground between pleasing the crowd and accepting the Savior.

- **Ignore:** His first line of defense was to ignore him (he's not my problem). Jesus cannot be ignored. Revelation, eternity, truth, etc. demand we deal with the claims of Jesus.
- **Compromise:** Ask Jesus to bend a little to our wants and wishes. Syncretize our views of Jesus with the views of the world.
- **Intellectualize:** Parse every word and phrase looking for a discipleship loophole. Agree with the philosophical and theological prowess of Jesus without accepting his dominion over our lives.

All of these attempt to keep Jesus at an arm's length, to minimize his power in your life. But, that's just it, when Jesus is at a distance we miss out on his offer of rest, joy, peace, and life. If you want the life that Jesus offers, if you want him to embrace you with the rest he can give, then you have to come *close* and **submit all you are to all he is**.

Unforgivable Sin: 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.

- Blasphemy is a type of slander, saying a lie particularly about God. When they say Jesus isn't sent from God, or doesn't heal with the authority of God, etc. But Jesus teaches that even that, **though a sin**, is **forgivable**. It is wrong and sinful but is forgivable.
- Blasphemy is evil and wicked but God forgives even Blasphemers.
 - Peter denied Jesus and was forgiven and commissioned by Jesus.
 - Paul "was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief" (1 Tim 1:13).
- But the Pharisees have not just **ignorantly ignored** or **mislabeled** the identity of Jesus but **deliberately rejected the work of the Spirit of God**. They have called the work of the Spirit of God the work of Satan. This deliberate, antagonistic, rejection has effectively hardened their hearts to the Spirit. They don't merely mislabel or misunderstand the work of God, they pervert it by ascribing it to Satan.
 - Only God knows someone's heart, so we would never pronounce someone to have committed such a sin. But we need to recognize that this is a possibility.
- There are those like the Pharisees who live in **willful unbelief, persistent rebellion, an final denial**.
 - "For penitence they substitute hardening, for confession plotting. By means of their own criminal and completely inexcusable callousness, they are dooming themselves. Their sin is unpardonable because they are unwilling to tread the path that leads to pardon" (Hendrickson).
- Imagine salvation is "crossing a river." Some are hesitant to cross, others want to finish something on this side before they cross. The Pharisees effectively have "blown up the bridge."
- They are sick and need medicine but they don't just not like the taste or the side-effects or are frightened of the treatment, they are "anti-vaxxers" they think the medicine is bad, wicked, and evil!

Merciful Warning: "Wake-up call to the arrogant, not a bogey[man] to frighten those of tender conscience" (France). This is a call to soften your heart, don't let your heart become hard to the work of God (Heb 3:8, 15, 4:7; Ps 95:7-11; Ex 17:7, Num 20:13).

- A wicked heart will eventually display itself, often in wicked words.

2. When Your Words Condemn You (vv. 33-37)

³³ "Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. ³⁴ You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. ³⁵ The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. ³⁶ I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, ³⁷ for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

Proverb: ³³ "Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. A simple proverb (cf. "give him an inch and he'll take a mile). It's

not literal but making a simple point: a bad tree produces bad fruit. Bad fruit reflects a bad tree. You don't improve the fruit of a tree from the outside but from the inside. If you want better fruit you have to pay attention to the health of the roots (e.g., difference between adding some good works and avoiding bad works than dealing with the root and overcoming sin, cf. pornography overcoming vs. throwing the computer out the window).

Your Words Betray You: ⁴ You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. ³⁵ The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. Jesus pulls no punches in his condemnation of the Pharisees. He calls into question everything they are saying about righteousness, the law, and obedience to God. They have portrayed themselves as "extra holy" but that's impossible. Whatever good works they do are like tying a good piece of fruit onto the branch of a dead tree. And, as is evident in this passage, *eventually* their words revealed the wickedness of their hearts.

- Our words reveal our character. Our words reveal our heart.
 - Hot Mic Moments (different than our current president who doesn't seem to mind when the mic is on). Times when someone *didn't* know their words were heard:
 - George Bush and Dick Cheney didn't realize the mic could hear them trashing a New York Times reporter.
 - Obama trashed Kanye in a 2009 interview assuming his comments were off the record — they weren't.
- In the end, we can't speak good when evil is on the inside. At best we have **hypocrisy** at worst **evil words**. Our hypocritical shield will eventually fail us and we will speak words of malice, lies, vulgarity, etc.

Eternal Perspective: ³⁶ I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, ³⁷ for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." Your words will reveal you on the day of judgment. A "careless" or "idle" word is not just a casual word but an false word: "not 'thoughtless' words, such as a carefree joke, but deedless one" (cf. Jas). Like a lazy person who out to be busy doing what they say but is, instead loafing around. These words are broken promises and shattered vows.

- ²⁸ "What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' ²⁹ And he answered, 'I will not,' but afterward he changed his mind and went. ³⁰ And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, 'I go, sir,' but did not go. ³¹ Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you. ³² For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him (Matt 21:28-32).
- On the day of judgment, there will be plenty of evidence (i.e. words) to condemn you. You have spoken plenty of lies and gossip, plenty of broken promises, jealous insults, etc. But have you spoken the words of faith in Jesus:

- ⁸ But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); ⁹ because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved (Rom 10:8-10).

Conclusion

(1) There are modern day opponents of Jesus who are hard-hearted. They're not agnostic, undetermined, or ignorant of the facts: they have considered and rejected.

- “But I do reject Jesus Christ. He is not my Lord. If he did exist, I would tell him to his face that if he created a hell, he should go to Hell — he's an immoral person by my standards of trying to avoid harm” (Hitchens).

(2) We need to be careful not to harden our hearts (admonition through scripture).

- “God, make me a man with thick skin and a soft hear. Make me a man who is tough and tender. Make me tough so I can handle life. Make me tender so I can love people. God, make me a man” (Darrin Patrick).
- We need soft hearts and thick skin. We need to be tough about the right things but always remain sensitive toward the things of Jesu.
- Is your heart bitter and tough toward the grace and goodness of Jesus? What would it look like to let down your guard? What would it look like to come to Jesus with all of your fears, doubts, burdens, and needs? Come find the rest your soul seeks in the arms of your gracious, heavenly Father.