

STUDY FIVE | MATTHEW 12:15-37

THE TOUGH AND TENDER SERVANT

OVERVIEW

Matthew's depiction of Spirit-empowered Jesus in these verses present him as *Servant* (v 18); *Son of David* (v 23) and *Son of Man* (v 32). All three identities are expressions of God's sovereign purpose that through Jesus the gospel should go to all the nations (v 21).

THE SERVANT AND THE SPIRIT (VV 15-21)

Jesus' withdrawal from the grain fields where he had debated with the Pharisees concerning the Sabbath was not out of fear (v 14) but a matter of timing. As he continues to heal those who followed him (the new era of salvation, Matt 11: 4-6) Jesus curiously warns the crowd not to tell others about him (v 16). Often termed *The Messianic Secret* this instruction tempered Israel's expectations about an all-conquering Messiah who would bring political and military success and overthrow the powers of the day. Instead Matthew anchors Jesus' ministry in the words of Isaiah 42:1-4. With his Father's election and approval (v 18) the Spirit empowered Servant would bring justice for the nations through a ministry of hope and reconciliation. The long expected Messiah would bring a ministry of restoration and rest (Matt 11:28-30) inaugurated through humility and service. The justice delivered (v 20) would be that which deals with the judgment we have incurred against God and is achieved through the sacrificial victory of the cross (see also Isaiah 52:13-53:6).

THE SERVANT AND THE SON OF DAVID (VV 22-29)

The recognition of Jesus' connection with the line of David (v 23) endears him to the crowd and alienates him before the Pharisees (v 24). *Son of David* is a favoured term of Matthew (Matt 1:1), a title also attributed to Joseph (Matt 1:20). The Davidic kingship represented the season of rest and renewal King David achieved through his own (military) leadership of God's people as the Lord's anointed. Even the Jewish leadership acknowledged the Messianic expectations associated with King David (Matt 22:42).

'COME UNTO ME'

JANUARY 31

MATT 10:1-31 WORKERS FOR THE HARVEST

FEBRUARY 7

MATT 10:32-42 THE UNDIVIDED DISCIPLE

FEBRUARY 14

MATT 11:1-30 KNOWN & UNKNOWN

FEBRUARY 21

MATT 12:1-14 LORD OF THE SABBATH

FEBRUARY 28

MATT 12:15-37 THE TOUGH & TENDER SERVANT

MARCH 7

MATT 12:38-50 WHO ARE MY FAMILY?

MARCH 14

MATT 13:1-23 THE SOWER & THE SEEDS

MARCH 21

MATT 13:24-43 THE WEEDS, THE SEED & THE YEAST

MARCH 28

MATT 13:44-58 THE TREASURE, THE PEARL & THE NET

RESOURCE

A GREAT LIGHT DAWNS

PETER BOLT

(READING THE BIBLE TODAY)

The accusation of Jesus' being an agent of Beelzebul, the Prince of Demons is so extravagantly wild that Jesus quickly moves to expose their hypocrisy. Satan driving out Satan (v 26, if that were possible) would divide his own kingdom and bring about its downfall. Anyone driving out demons in Beelzebul's name would contradict the evil purpose of his kingdom. Furthermore, Jewish religion appeared to include the practice of exorcism, and Jesus questions the source of their authority to do so (v 27)?

Jesus' work of healing is effected by the Spirit of God and is evidence of the Kingdom's arrival (v 28). The parable of v 29 anticipates Jesus work of the cross where Satan's stronghold would be comprehensively defeated.

THE SERVANT AND THE SON OF MAN (VV 30-37)

Son of Man is a similarly favoured term of Matthew, one used by Jesus of himself throughout the Gospel. This Daniel figure (Dan 7:13) is the one who receives authority from the Ancient of Days to bring about his purposes and establish his Kingdom on earth. Symbolic of Jesus' authority as the Son of Man are his heavenly origins (Matt 8:20); the authority to forgive sins (Matt 9:6); his mission to bring in the Kingdom (Matt 10:23); to execute judgment (Matt 16:27) all of which will be achieved through his suffering and death (Matt 17:22-23) before a glorious victory (Matt 19:28). The *Son of Man* is God's chosen one who in his earthly ministry establishes his heavenly Kingship and invites all who would accept him to enter it.

It is Jesus' understanding of his own ministry that prompts the condemnation of the Pharisees' slander. It is not possible to take a neutral position in response to the Messiah (v 30) and the consequences of our response reach into eternity (vv 36-37). Jesus' ministry of the Word (Matt 13 and Parable of the Sower) prompts us to consider our own response.

The sin and slander delivered by the Pharisees against Jesus is also against the Holy Spirit and will not be forgiven (vv 31-32). It represents an unrelenting opposition to Jesus even when the truth about him clearly testifies to the work of the Spirit of God. The visible evidence of Jesus' Messiahship that the Pharisees were witness to only led them to condemn him by death on the cross.

Against this condemnation Jesus assures his listeners that forgiveness is none the less the way of the gospel and repentance is available to all who will turn and recognise the Son of Man (v 32). The good and bad trees of v 33 speak to the authentic response necessary from all who encounter Jesus. Our words are an expression of the heart and will call us to account on the day of judgment (vv 36-37). Empty or careless words will condemn us just as honesty and humility before Christ will acquit us (Matt 7:24-27), yet the emphasis is on the response we make now.

GETTING STARTED

1. *The words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.* (Proverbs 12:18).

The hearts of the wise make their mouths prudent, and their lips promote instruction. (Proverbs 16:23).

The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to the inmost parts. (Proverbs 18:8).

Discuss.

INTO THE TEXT

READ VERSES 15-29

2. What was Jesus' purpose in warning the crowds not to tell others about him?
3. What is the character of the Spirit empowered Servant Isaiah spoke of (Is 42:14) and what would his ministry achieve?
4. Why would the reference to the Son of David in v 23 have incited the response by the Pharisees in v 24?
5. Identify the contrasting Kingdoms in vv 25-28.
6. How does the parable of v 29 explain how the Kingdom of God has come?

READ VERSES 30-37

7. Reflecting on v 30, do you think it's possible to adopt a neutral position when it comes to responding to Jesus?
8. What do you think is the unforgiveable sin in vv 31-32? Why can words spoken against the Son of Man be forgiven?

TAKEAWAY

9. Of the following, who do you think is in the position to determine if a person has committed the unforgivable sin?
- Church elders
 - God alone
 - A minister
 - The Archbishop

10. Do you think anyone is beyond God's forgiveness if they truly repent?

11. Can you think of words you have spoken against someone that you would take back if you had the chance?