

Text: Matthew 12:33-37

Title: Good men and evil men

Truth: A person's character is known by behavior, especially speech.

Date/Location: Wed November 24 and Sunday Nov 28, 2021 at FBC

Introduction

The Pharisees and their friends rejected Jesus and were not open to reconsidering their thinking. They were repeatedly attributing the miraculous works of Jesus by the Holy Spirit as coming from Satan. This was a violation that was unforgivable because people who do this do not seek forgiveness in Christ, and true forgiveness from God is found nowhere else. The repetitive nature of it indicates a hardness of heart that is beyond what God has chosen to repair.

After declaring the sin of the blasphemy of the Spirit (the unpardonable sin), then Jesus explains that what the Pharisees were saying was the symptom of a deeper problem.

I. Metaphor: Good and Bad Trees, v. 33

- A. A tree is good and its fruit is good. The two "goods" go together.
- B. A tree is bad and its fruit is bad. Again, the two "bads" go together.
- C. A tree is known by its fruit. Start by analyzing the fruit. If it is good, then you can figure that the tree is functioning like it was designed by God to function. If the fruit is bad, then working backwards from that result, you understand that the tree is not functioning properly. It is not what it is supposed to be, and this calls for a fix or replacement. Maybe it needs fertilizer, more water, or it is diseased and should be cut down.

You might object about a bad tree and say, "Actually the tree looks very healthy and has good shape and good leaves and strong branches." But if it does not produce what it is supposed to produce, then it is not doing its job, no matter how well it "presents to the public."

- D. From this metaphor we derive the principle that a person or institution of people who produce bad behavior are doing so because of their corrupted inner nature.

II. Application of the Metaphor, v. 34-35

A. The Lord call them vipers—a very bad kind of bad tree! *Vipers* is an extremely negative word. *Snakes* or *serpents* is the same idea and it conjures up images of a lair teeming with slithering snakes with their nasty poison. It is a picture of pure evil, connecting the religious leaders to that serpent of old, Satan. Their fruit was “serpenty” or “viperish.”

Three times in Matthew (and one parallel in Luke 3:7), the word *vipers* is used. John the Baptist called the Pharisees and Sadducees a brood of vipers as he urged the people to repent. He told these Jewish leaders to produce fruit that demonstrates their repentance, so was calling for them to repent as well. Jesus uses the term here in Matthew 12:34, and then again in Matthew 23:33 as he rebukes the hypocritical scribes and Pharisees.

It is interesting that the Pharisees claimed that Jesus was moved by the Devil in His exorcism and healing work. But it was they themselves who were of their father the Devil (John 8:44). They thought they knew Jesus, but they failed to know themselves!

B. Jesus says that these men are evil. He is the omniscient Son of God, so there is no way we can legitimately question his analysis of their inner character. In John 2:25 we are reminded that Jesus knows what is in man. He knows generally, and he knows specifically (Matt. 9:4, 12:25; Luke 6:8). They were truly evil people. They may have been dressed in religious vestments (or expensive Italian business suits or in high political office) but this did not shield them from criticism. They were evil. Still doubt it? Be reminded of Matthew 12:14 where they plotted how they could kill Jesus.

C. Because they were evil, what they spoke was not good. The evil in their hearts showed itself in their speech. They couldn't hide it—certainly not from Jesus, and not from God the Father, and most of the time, not from discerning believers either. Their evil tainted everything they did and said. It colored all of their activities.

I believe that the speech of any unbeliever has to be scrutinized carefully. Someone who believes killing babies in the womb is a good thing immediately casts doubt upon the remainder of their

speech. The same goes for all kinds of topics. Certain topics are “safer” than others. An unbelieving math teacher might teach mathematics very well. But when he ranges off topic into moral issues, your antenna needs to become a lot more sensitive.

- D. Here is the general truth derived from that: out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. The heart is the thinking center of a man. If you spoke it, it came out of your inner being. No excusing yourself by saying, “That was not really me.” Indeed it was truly you, and you know it. Who else could it be—the mouse in your pocket? It was your sinful tendencies within you that spoke that way, if it was evil.

But if it is a good thing you said, that too is an overflow of the heart. Thank the Lord for improved speech!

- E. The heart is like the root and inner life of a tree. The speech is like the fruit of a tree. Bad fruit = bad heart. Good fruit = good heart. Of course, the challenge for us is that we have some of both, a paradoxical situation that the apostle James likened to a spring sending forth sometimes salt water, and other times fresh (James 3:12).
- F. Verse 35 is given as further amplification of verse 34. Now the Lord speaks of what is in one’s inner life as a treasure, a storehouse. *Treasure* has a very positive connotation in modern English. In this passage the treasure is either good or evil.

A good person, the Lord says, brings out from his life good. He can give good because that is what he has. Likewise, a bad person has evil inside, and can only bring forth evil. Like root, like fruit. He can only bring OUT what he has IN.

So, may I give you a friendly warning? Be careful what you put IN to your life, because that is what will come out.

III. Judgment Based on Speech, v. 36-37 [Nov 28, 2021]

And there will be accountability for that which comes out, even in seemingly small ways out of your mouth.

- A. Every word will be accounted for in judgment.

1. For the Pharisees, their words were more than idle commentary—they were settled, hardened, malicious, hateful, and murderous, besides unbelieving. They will give an account for those words on the day of judgment.
2. Jesus tells us that for every empty/careless/worthless word that you speak, you will give an account of it before God at the throne of His judgment. To me, this strikes reverence and fear into my heart because I have put out a lot of words that I wish I had not put out. Thank the Lord that Christ has died for my sinful words as well as all my other sinful behavior and thoughts, and nature, and my part in sinful humanity descended from Adam.

B. Words can be used by God as a basis of justification and condemnation. Why? Not because salvation is by works, but that works demonstrate the reality of salvation. “Bear fruits worthy of repentance.” When those fruits are seen, then it is evident that the repentance is real.

Speech is one kind of work, and what the Lord is saying is that He could look at just your speech and figure out what is in your heart—whether you truly believe or not! Since what is stored up in the heart is what comes out, if you look backwards into that factory from what comes off the end of the assembly line, you will figure out what is in the plant to begin with. If you see cars or bags of potato chips, you know what is in there, basically. Same with speech—if you see mostly trash or mostly virtue coming out, that is a very good indicator of what is going on inside the heart-factory of the person.

The Pharisees gave out very bad words, delivering them like the poison of a king cobra (Psalm 140:3, Romans 3:13).

C. The words of humanity will be evaluated on the *day of judgment*. There is coming a specific day of judgment at which all of humanity’s works will be evaluated. And one more key item will come under consideration: if one has trusted in Jesus Christ. If yes, then the works will be evaluated for reward. If no, then works will be evaluated and found sorely lacking. Listen to the Scripture’s testimony on this subject:

Eccl. 12:14 "For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil."

Matthew 10:15 "It will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment..." See Matt. 11:22, 24.

Matthew 7:21-23 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. 22 "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' 23 "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'

Acts 17:30-31 "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, ³¹"because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead."

Romans 2:5 "But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God."

Romans 14:12 "So then each of us shall give account of himself to God."

1 Corinthians 4:5 "Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God."

2 Corinthians 5:10 "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."

1 Peter 4:5 "They will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead."

2 Peter 2:9 "The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment."

2 Peter 3:7 “but the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition [destruction] of ungodly men.”

1 John 4:17 “Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world.”

Hebrews 4:13 “And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.”

Hebrews 13:17 “Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.”

James 3:1 “My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.”

Jude 6 “The angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day.”

Jude 14-15 “The Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, ¹⁵to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.”

Revelation 20:13 “And they were judged each one according to his works...and anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.”

Conclusion

Speech is a very good indicator one of one’s heart. You may not have opportunity to *do* as much bad as your heart would if it had such open doors. People probably speak more evil than they have done. That is because it is so easy to speak. The heart and mouth are only a few inches apart! So being judged by your speech is probably worse than you think.

I believe this speech includes your thought-speech, not just that which you have uttered out loud.

An old saying goes something like this: “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words/names will never hurt me.” That statement has some value because it teaches us not to take what other people say too seriously. They do not know what they are talking about, or they are exceedingly mean in what they say and as such, there is little value in their words. Today, however, that statement has come under scrutiny because it is not true that words do not hurt. Words can start wars; words can do deep damage in a relationship.

We can adapt the saying to highlight the meaning of this message: “Sticks and stones may break *my* bones, but if you use evil words, they will hurt *you*.” Why? Because your words will be an evidence used in the courtroom of your future judgment. Indeed, “What you say can and will be used against you.”

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