

# MATTHEW

## Chapter 12

*Lord of the Sabbath*

**At that time Jesus went through the grain-fields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. 2 But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, “Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath.” 3 He said to them, “Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, and those who were with him: 4 how he entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him to eat nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? 5 Or have you not read in the Law how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless? 6 I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. 7 And if you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless. 8 For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.”**

These 14 verses are the only text in Matthew’s entire Gospel that describes or evaluates actions on the Sabbath. (CC)

**12:1** *grain-fields*. Of wheat or barley, the latter eaten by poorer people. (CSB)

The narrative introduction (12:1) connects this unit closely to what has preceded it and also introduces the occasion for the contention with Jesus. (CC)

**12:2** The Pharisees resumed their faultfinding (9:11, 34). The Law of Moses forbade all forms of work on the Sabbath (Ex 31:13–15), including the harvesting of grain (Ex 34:21; Dt 5:14), which the Pharisees accused the disciples of doing. (TLSB)

*sabbath* – On this day of solemn rest, no fires were to be kindled (Ex 35:3) and sticks could not be gathered (Num 15:32-36), perhaps in order to keep people from kindling fire. Normal work, such as carrying burdens, performing commercial activities, and treading winepresses, was forbidden (Jer 17:19-27); Amos 8:5; Neh 13:15-22). (CC)

By remarkable contrast, the generations leading up to the ministry of Jesus evidence a growing body of Jewish legislation regarding what is allowed and forbidden on the Sabbath. The earliest list of specific rulings occurs in *Jubilees* 50:1-13. (CC)

Yang, *Jesus and the Sabbath*, 56, 60 reports: Included in the list of prohibited activities in *Jubilees* 50:8 are intercourse with one’s wife, making plans for a later commercial venture and drawing water. (CC)

The *Damascus Document* offers a long list of 28 regulations, and a separate list of punishments also occurs. (CC)

Yang, *Jesus and the Sabbath*, 62-64 included in the list of prohibited activities saying a stupid useless word, discussing riches or gain, and walking more than a 1000 cubits was forbidden. (CC)

This preoccupation lies behind the Pharisees' criticism of Jesus' disciples for their activity of plucking and eating grain on the Sabbath. (CC)

Garland, Reading Matthew, 136, offers an appealing analogy: The Sabbath was therefore considered to be a symbol of what made Israel distinct and special to God, and by observing it Israel celebrated the act of creation and imitated God, who rested on the seventh day (Gen 2:1-3; Exod 31:12-17). As a kind of national banner, the breach of the Sabbath would have been similar to desecration of the flag in modern times; and it triggered similar reactions. (CC)

**12:3** *he said to them* – When the Pharisees declare that the disciples have violated the command against work on the Sabbath, Jesus simply refuses to enter into that debate with them. His succinct, three-part response is not an attempt to out-argue them on the matter applying Sabbath legislation. Rather, Jesus rejects their claim that His disciples have violated the Sabbath at all, and He does so, both implicitly and explicitly, by descalating that He and His ministry are the greater reality that fulfills everything to which the OT points. (CC)

*What David did* – Jesus cited a biblical example familiar to the Pharisees in order to claim authority as great as Israel's greatest king. David demanded five loaves of bread from the priest at the tabernacle in Nob, a village just east of Jerusalem. (TLSB)

Jesus is not, however, drawing an analogy between an earlier valid exception to the Sabbath Law in David's time and His own disciples' actions. Several factors show that the incident with David is dissimilar to the account of Jesus and His disciples in the grain fields. First, Jesus nowhere admits that His disciples have broken any Law whatsoever; to the contrary, He explicitly refers to them as "innocent" in 12:7. Second, this account of David doesn't work very well as a pattern for the incident with Jesus in the grain fields. David was fleeing for his life. Jesus is not in any danger (yet). David and his companions ate the showbread. Jesus' disciples are "working," but Matthew does not say that Jesus Himself plucked or ate any grain. Third, it can be argued that David's act was not, under any reconstruction, a violation of Sabbath Law at all. Rather, what was unlawful was that he and his men ate God's holy bread, which only the consecrated priests were allowed to eat; no layman was permitted to eat those loaves on any day of the week. (CC)

Jesus' first rejoinder invites all who hear to a new appreciation of how significant Jesus Himself is. For it David and his men were justified in violating one of God's commandments because the son of Jesse was the true anointed king of Israel who found himself in need, how much more are Jesus' disciples free to ignore a particular Pharisaic interpretation of Sabbath observance – because the One greater than David who gives true Sabbath rest (11:28-30), is present among them? Jesus is interpreting the account in 1 Samuel 21 in light of His own identity and ministry. (CC)

**12:4** *bread of the Presence* – Each Sabbath, 12 fresh loaves of bread were to be set on a table in the Holy Place (Ex 25:30; Lev 24:5–9). The old loaves were eaten by the priests. (CSB)

Twelve sacred loaves were placed before the Lord every Sabbath as a thank offering and were to be eaten only by the priests. However, only this "holy bread" was available for David and his men, and so they ate it. Jesus, the Son of David, likewise allowed that it was more important on this occasion for His followers to eat than to rest on the Sabbath. (TLSB)

**12:5** *profane the day*. By doing work associated with the sacrifices.(CSB)

To fulfill their religious duties of offering sacrifices, priests were required to work on the Sabbath. Their worship responsibilities took priority over the Sabbath. (TLSB)

There are more important things, after all, than avoiding work on the Sabbath, and Jesus' contemporaries likely knew and agreed with this basic point. (CC)

Yang, *Jesus and the Sabbath*, 91 notes in summary fashion that Tannaitic Jewish literature allows for six occasions on which the Sabbath can be violated by performing various kinds of work or activity: (1) circumcision, (2) temple service, (3) Passover, (4) saving Scriptures and food from fire, (5) saving life, and (6) self-defense in war. (CC)

When the priests carry out their duties on a Sabbath in the temple, they are innocent of Sabbath violation (12:5). This would not have been a controversial point. (CC)

In the Torah God commands priests to perform tasks that require work on the Sabbath as part of their work in the tabernacle (later, in the temple). These tasks include the baking of twelve loaves of the holy bread and setting them out on the Sabbath on the table before God's to replace the loaves from the previous Sabbath (Lev 24:5-9; notes continually in Ex 25:30; see also, e.g., 1 Chr 9:32); providing oil for and lighting the Menorah lamps so that they would burn continually every night (Lev 25:1-4; see also, e.g., Ex 27:20; 2 Chr 13:11); and offering the continual daily burnt offerings, sacrifices every morning and every evening of the week – without exception on the Sabbath – so that the fire would continue to burn on the altar perpetually (Ex 29:38-46; Lev 6:1-11). (CC)

**12:6** *greater than the temple* – Jesus was greater even than the temple and its worship. His comparisons in vv 3–5 made the case. (TLSB)

In Jesus, however, something greater than the temple is present. For Jesus, bodily and in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, is "God is with us," Emmanuel (Is 7:14; Mt 1:23). The temple was established in God's OT Word. Jesus has come to complete and to fulfill those same OT Scriptures (Mt 5:17). By Jesus' ministry of truth and healing, God has broken into history to restore and forgive (9:1-8). (CC)

Jesus' disciples likely would not have yet understood all these things, even though they had begun to believe in Him. It is absolutely certain, however, that Jesus' words would have immediately infuriated those who were setting themselves in unbelieving opposition to Him. (CC)

**12:7** *mercy and not sacrifice* – People in Hosea's day put a greater priority on offering sacrifices than on steadfast love of the heart. The Pharisees prioritized the details of the Sabbath law over mercy. (TLSB)

God called the eighth-century BC prophet Hosea to prophesy against Israel because the people had adulterated the worship of Israel's God syncretistically with the fertility religion of Baal. They apparently performed some of the outward rites prescribed in the Torah (Hos 2:13) but without true devotion to their God or true concern for their neighbor. As robbers lie in wait for a man, so the priests band together; they murder on the way to Shechem; they commit villainy" (Hos 6:8-9). Yahweh, speaking through Hosea, did not reject the sacrificial system He had instituted through Moses. So great was Israel's sin, however, that he resorted to the exaggerated device of dialectical negation in order to call the people to repentance. (CC)

*guiltless* – This principle of mercy over sacrifice and the authority of Jesus shielded His disciples from guilt. (TLSB)

**12:8** *the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath* – The Father had handed all things over to Jesus (11:27), the Son of Man. His lordship extended also over the Sabbath Day law. (TLSB)

The problem to be solved is not a matter of rightly interpreting the Sabbath command to refrain from work, as Jesus’ opponents imagined. The problem is standing in front of them in the person of Jesus Himself. What do you make of Jesus? (CC)

**12:1–8** God’s purpose in giving the Sabbath law was to provide physical rest for His people. But those in Jesus’ day who tried to follow all the Sabbath regulations imposed by the Pharisees found that the law had become a heavy burden, a yoke on their necks. We keep the Sabbath Day holy when “we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it” (SC, p xxxv). Jesus offers true rest, the yoke of the Gospel (11:29–30). • Loving Savior, keep me from quibbling about trivial things and from neglecting Your Word. Amen. (TLSB)

**9 He went on from there and entered their synagogue. 10 And a man was there with a withered hand. And they asked him, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”—so that they might accuse him. 11 He said to them, “Which one of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out? 12 Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.” 13 Then he said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” And the man stretched it out, and it was restored, healthy like the other. 14 But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him.**

**12:9** *entered their synagogue* – Possibly at Capernaum or another Galilean town (cf 11:21, 23). (TLSB)

**12:10** *withered hand* – Lit, “dry.” Paralyzed, shrunken, and atrophied because of disease or accident. (TLSB)

*heal on the Sabbath* – The rabbis prohibited healing on the Sabbath, unless it was feared the victim would die before the next day. (CSB)

Scholars do think it likely that an emergency healing to save a human life would have been permitted on the Sabbath but less urgent healings (“elective procedures,” to use a modern phrase) would have been forbidden. (CC)

**12:11** Jesus assumed that His hypothetical question about lifting a sheep out of a pit on the Sabbath would have a positive answer. The Pharisees would certainly rescue their sheep. (TLSB)

**12:12** *more valuable is a man* – Humans have greater value than animals. Jesus declared that doing good on the Sabbath took priority over a too-strict application of the Law. Jewish religious law did permit medical treatment when life was in danger. (TLSB)

As the Lord of the Sabbath, Jesus knows God’s original intention for it, and so He teaches now with authority that reveals, in a new way, the spirit and intention of the OT institution. As the one who fulfills the Law and the Prophets and does not abolish them (5:1&), Jesus is not doing away with God’s Sabbath. (CC)

It is entirely appropriate that on this particular day of rest, the Lord of the Sabbath restores a part of God's fallen creation by healing the man with the withered hand, thereby giving him rest from his affliction. This healing is a portent of the restoration of all God's people by their bodily resurrection on the Last Day (cf 27:52-53). It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath. (CC)

However bluntly or subtly, Judaism in Jesus' day had moved toward the error of making the Sabbath too much a matter of human observance – what people are obliged to do, rather than what God does for His people. (CC)

The Sabbath was not primarily about what Israel was to do (or not do). It was about what God – and only God – could do for Israel. God rested on the seventh day because He had completed His labors. But the people of Israel could never complete their labors, and so they needed the Sabbath in order to receive from God the renewal and restoration that only God could provide. One cannot rightly understand or observe the Sabbath without realizing that it centers in Him and His forgiveness and His truth. (CC)

We must, however also say this: where Christ is present to give rest and to restore His people, there will (and must) also be present God's purpose for His people "to do good" (Mt 12:12). Having rested in Christ, how can Christians not then move out into their fellowship, into their vocations, and into their world and seek to show and to share the restoration they have received and to which they look forward? (CC)

Pastors and other leaders in Christian communities, then face a challenger. In North America the challenge is presented by the "sixty minute" rule: the assumption that the "normal" time of resting in Jesus in church, even for exceptionally pious persons, is approximately one hour every week. (CC)

Christians cannot expect to resist the values of the unbelieving world if they devote one hour of the week to meditating on God's word and the other 167 hours to providing for the needs of their bodies and enjoying worldly entertainment. We need regular Bible study with fellow Christians. We need to recognize the importance of regular family devotions and personal Bible study. We need to cultivate the habit of remembering and applying the truths of God's word when we are confronted with temptations or faced with decisions in daily life. God's children will find their greatest joy and satisfaction in studying his word and thinking about it day and night. (Psalms 1 of People's Bible Commentary, Page 42)

Perhaps the reason why Christians so often seem to lack the motive or desire to do good – to reach outside of themselves for the benefit of their neighbor – lies in the fact that as Christians, we have not actually rested in Jesus very well or very long. (CC)

Jesus' messianic claims drove the Pharisees to plot Jesus' death. (TLSB)

**12:9–14** The Pharisees' eagerness to find fault with Jesus is a common sin. Jesus warns His disciples about seeing the speck in another's eye while overlooking the log in one's own eye (7:3–5). That Jesus was the victim of false accusations is another example of how He took on Himself the sins of the world. Though we have many faults, for which we deserve condemnation, He has washed them all away by His innocent suffering and death. • Dearest Jesus, forgive me for the times I unlovingly find fault with others. Move me to do good as You have done good for me. Amen. (TLSB)

*God's Chosen Servant*

**15 Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from there. And many followed him, and he healed them all 16 and ordered them not to make him known. 17 This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: 18 “Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. 19 He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets; 20 a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory; 21 and in his name the Gentiles will hope.”**

**12:15** *Jesus withdrew* – Jesus withdraws because the right time for Him to die has not yet come. For now, He refrains from conflict that would escalate into a final confrontation with His enemies, even as He continues His gracious ministry of restoration on behalf of the crowds that are continuing to follow Him in Galilee. (CC)

As Jesus had done after John's arrest, He withdrew from a confrontation with the Pharisees. His hour had not yet come (Jn 13:1). (TLSB)

*healed them all* – Gentiles may have been among the many who followed Jesus (cf Mk 3:8). Jesus demonstrated His compassion by turning away none who needed healing. (TLSB)

**12:16** *not to him known* – His powerful ministry of healings and exorcisms, then, is at the same time a paradoxically humble one that no one can fully comprehend without seeing its cruciform end. For that reason, Jesus does not invite the crowds to proclaim His identity and work; rather He sternly rebukes them not to make Him known. Only after His earthly ministry has been completed will Jesus issue the Great Commission (28:19-20). (CC)

As on previous occasions (e.g., 9:30), Jesus downplayed His ministry of physical healing so that His disciples would better understand that He came, above all, to bring spiritual healing. (TLSB)

**12:17** *fulfill* – Mt often refers to OT Scriptures fulfilled in Christ's coming (e.g., 2:14, 17, 23). (TLSB)

**12:18–21** Quotation based on Is 42:1–4, though not word for word. (TLSB)

**12:18** *servant* – Gk *pais*; may also be translated “son.” Jesus was revealed as the Servant/Son of the Father at His Baptism, and the Spirit descended on Him (3:13–17). (TLSB)

*justice* – God's righteousness to condemn and forgive is revealed in His Law and Gospel. (TLSB)

*Gentiles* – Though Jesus had forbidden His disciples to go to the Gentiles (10:5), proclamation to all nations was very much a part of God's plan (28:19). The quotation concludes with a second mention of the Gentiles (v 21). (TLSB)

**12:19–20** Jesus described Himself as “gentle and lowly in heart” (11:29). (TLSB)

**12:20** Jesus mends broken lives (see v. 15; Jn 4:4–42; 8:3–11). (CSB)

*brings justice to victory* – And even though the fullness of justice, of putting the world right, cannot and will not happen until the day of judgment and salvation known only to the Father (24:36), still Christ is at work in the world now, putting things right. (CC)

That means, in the first place, forgiving sins. It also means bringing forgiven sinner into a different kind of fellowship, where people learn to treat one another as treasured brothers and sisters. And it also means practical deeds of mercy and healing and wholeness, as the church sees the need and takes the opportunities to move, in the name of Jesus, into places of need. It's about embodied people. It's about a world that Christ died and rose to save. It's about Christ, through His people as through instruments, putting things right in small, limited, anticipatory ways, even as we long for the great day of justice to dawn with the coming of the Son of Man. (CC)

Notes on quote from Isaiah in verses 18-21 are found below:

**Isiah 42:1** HERE – hen – lo! (Strong's)

Behold – invites the attention of the world – both the Jew and of the nations – to a new revelation. It looks back to the similar expression of verse 24 and 29 of the preceding chapter, which draw down the curtain upon the idol-gods, while this “behold” reveals One who is to occupy their place, and to be a worthy object of the worship of mankind. (PC)

God announces this Servant boldly and dramatically. It is as if God had his arm stretched out and pointed to this one as His Servant. “Here He is!” No other servant of Lord received such an introduction, and God's announcement signals something quite different and important about this Servant as compared to all the others. If we were to place all these servants together and look at them, God would direct our attention to this Servant. For example, if all these servants were placed on a table and spread out like rare coins, God would be pointing at one of them saying, “Here's My Servant. This is the special one.” (PBC)

*here is my servant* – These are words of demonstration, as if he were pointing to something worth seeing. He is calling us away from errors and therefore showing us someone else. (Luther)

In the royal terminology of the ancient Near East “servant” meant something like “trusted envoy” or “confidential representative.” (CSB)

Here He gives Him the doctor's degree. “If you want to know and be wise, look to this Christ, the Doctor and the One in charge and up and doing. Him I have put in charge. Keep your eye on Him, observe what He does, says, and teaches, because He is My Servant.” This was not written for Christ's sake but for ours, so that we may be sure about His work and teaching and may have certainty about the emptiness of our idolatry. Nobody understands these things unless he believes. You must believe that Christ is a servant. It is as Paul says (1 Cor. 2:2): “I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” (Luther)

This Christ is an offense to the whole world. Therefore, in order to give us certainty this commendation of Christ is necessary. We see from experience that nothing is more absurd to the wisdom of the flesh than Christ, the Servant, and His Word. All are offended because of Him. All of us want to be God's servants while we please ourselves. Everything will be taken up and entrusted to Him alone. We should receive this with thanksgiving, but we attain to it ungratefully. (TLSB)

Ebed – doer, tiller, slave (Young)

Israel was to be a kingdom of priests – Exodus 19:6 – 1 Peter 2:9 – He will not be like Israel, my rebellious and faithless servant, not even like my prophets, yielding an imperfect obedience. (PC)

Though the word “servant” in the original does mean slave, it is in this connection an entirely honorable term. If he is the Lord’s servant, his is an honorable task. Many have been designated by this title: Abram (Gen 26:24), the patriarchs (Deut 9:27), Moses (Numbers 12:7), David (2 Sam. 3:18), prophets (Amos 3:7), even Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. 27:6), so the individual connotation of this title is far more common than the collective on a few instances Israel is referred to by this title. (Leupold)

This close relationship between God’s Servant, Jesus and God’s servants, His people, is visible also in the NT. Jesus assumed the role of a servant in His earthly ministry (Phil 2:5-11). He “did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28). The servant role is the model He left for us to imitate (John 13, especially v. 16), and the apostles are proud to begin many of the NT epistles by introducing themselves as Christ’s servants (Romans 1:1; etc.) (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 1)

*whom I uphold* – the father supports and sustains the Son. John 5:26, “As the Father hath life in Himself, so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself.” (PC)

“If you want to avoid error, if you want to find Me, please Me, then hear Him, receive His Word, teaching, and Spirit, for He is My treasure.” Here our ears must be glued to His mouth. Look only at His mouth and Word, and you will not be led astray, though meanwhile Satan rages. (Luther)

Means to lay firm hold of and keep upright. (KD)

He is man whom the Lord upholds or supports. He needs help in His task and He enjoys the very maximum of help in that the Lord upholds Him in every difficulty. (Leupold)

The same Hebrew verb describes Aaron and Hur supporting Moses arms (Ex. 17:12). God’s “supporting” keeps people from sinning (Ps. 17:5; 41:12\_ and protects them (Ps. 63:8-9) (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 1)

*chosen one* – Christ was chosen from all eternity (Max Lucado – when Adam and Eve sinned, Jesus packed His bags for Bethlehem) in God’s counsels to the great work of man’s redemption and to be the Mediator between God and man. (PC)

The Servants work will be part of God’s greater plan. (TLSB)

In Matthew 3:17 (Baptism) and 17:5 (Transfiguration) the reference to this passage is so obvious that the evangelist must be viewed as indicating that this passage is a prophecy concerning the Messiah. (Leupold)

Means to be hand picked by God to accomplish His purposes. David (Ps. 89:3), Moses (Ps. 106:23), and the people of Israel (Deut. 7:6-7) also are described as chosen. As a chosen one, Moses stood in the breach and turned God away from destroying His people (Ps. 106:23) (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 1)

*delight* – Cf. Lk 3:22. (CSB)

This is nothing else than the preaching of the Gospel. It is spoken to you to strengthen you. Before the world He will be an abomination and an enemy of God. He will appear as nothing less than an opponent of God. “Before Me He will be a source of delight. By comparison with the



flesh, the world, and the devil, in the eyes of the world nothing but the squalid and the weak will be manifest in Him. In My sight, however, He counts for very much. Therefore listen to Him, even if the world should regard Him as a heretic.” This consolation is necessary for us so that in this time we may cling to His Word and world, knowing that He is the elect Servant in whom God delights. Then we may boast in the saying: “I know for certain that the Word is true, even though all are opposed to it.” Alongside Him all our wisdom and power and treasure are nothing in the sight of God. Not only does He say that He will provide a teacher of the truth who will gather us, but He also says that He will grant the most delightful teaching. Understand this in terms of opposites: As my soul is irked by all religion, so I find delight in this Man alone. I started out to be brief, but I made it long because the text is so golden, so that I might encourage you in this time. (Luther)

Leviticus uses the word for sacrifices that are “acceptable” to God (Lev. 1:4; 7:18; 22:27). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 1)

*my Spirit on him* – Like the “Branch” of 11:2. (CSB)

“Friend, regard the righteousness of the laws and of the Pharisees as nothing, because I have not given them My Spirit, but My Spirit is in Him alone.” Paul referred to this with his highest praise: “In whom are hid all the treasures” (Col. 2:3), both physical and spiritual. Meanwhile He seems foolish, weak, and ridiculous, and therefore it is difficult to believe Him. For that reason He says, “To Him, to Him I have given the Spirit. No one ascends to heaven but He alone.” Therefore cling to Him and take nothing to yourselves except what is in Christ, because apart from Him we do nothing and are nothing but heaps of sin. Here, however, He gives us the Treasure, who embraces all those things which He accomplishes publicly through works and plans, as well as all remaining sin. Therefore He commends this unique God to us, because the heavens and earth and demons must tremble. (Luther)

The Servant is divinely authorized and empowered to carry out His assigned mission. However, He will not bring justice to the nations by forcing His will on the world by military campaigns as Cyrus did, threading down kings and rulers “as the potter treads clay” (41:25). There will be no noisy, flamboyant victory marches “in the street” (42:2). Yet He will bring it about that even the weakest in His worldwide dominion will have a rightful claim to the benefits He bestows. (TLSB)

On the OT level the reference to the Spirit almost invariably connotes power. So this statement means that the Servant is richly imbued with power. (Leupold)

God reminds us that He always first gives what He may demand later. His Servant will be endowed with His Spirit. The gift of the Spirit is not just knowledge, but power and insight into God’s will. (Is. 11:2) (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 1)

*justice.*† The weakest in his worldwide dominion will have rightful claim to the benefits he bestows. (CSB)

That is, “He will lead you out among the nations. He is different from Moses. He will be a light and a lamp with the Word to the scattered nations, so that they may believe and understand rightly. He proclaims His words to Jacob and His judgments in Israel. He will bring forth His judgment beyond the synagogue and into the whole world. I sent forth the Word, and it went in a weak and sickly manner because it had a lisping tongue. Here, however, the preaching of the Gospel convicts the world of sin.” So you see that the kingdom of Christ consists in the Word, in

rightful speaking, not in display, in gold and silver. It is, rather, a kingdom of righteousness, godliness, and harmony. (Luther)

This is the publication of Christianity throughout all the world. (PC)

It includes not only God's wrath against oppressors but also God's mercy. God's wrath is pronounced against Israel's wanton life, but God's form of justice in Christ also provides His mercy and forgiveness. This word for "justice" is parallel to "righteousness" in Is 1:27, where God promises to redeem His people with justice; and again in Is. 9:7 where the Son of David establishes His throne – the kingdom of God – with justice and righteousness. The vicarious atonement of Christ for the sins of the world is God's unique form of justice. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 1)

Its root word means to "wash." This ties the concept of justice and baptism together. Jesus fulfills God's justice by being washed for our sin. In Matthew 3:15 Jesus replies to John's questioning His baptism, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." God was bringing His justice through Jesus' baptism. To understand Jesus' baptism is to understand the cross, for Jesus began to take our sins upon Himself in Baptism. Thus God's justice was satisfied in washing. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 13, Part 1)

*to the nations* – First, note that the target of His words would be "the nations." He would not only serve the single nation of Israel, but His work would also have value for the Gentiles. (PBC)

**42:2** *not shout or cry out* – He will bring peace (see 9:6). (CSB)

He (Jesus the Suffering Servant) is so sure of Himself and of the cause He represents that He can well expect His message to carry itself successfully through every test. How often Jesus shunned publicity, even though His aim was to carry His gospel to all men. (Leupold)

He does not push Himself aggressively on anyone. All things and people are precious in His sight. (TLSB)

This passage is quoted in Matthew (12:18). It is an appreciation of the Word to make us take notice and be submissive and obedient ... He Himself will not be noisy in the streets nor make Himself heard in the open. How does this jibe? The noise is of two kinds: the noise of wrath and that of love. He did indeed cry in the preaching proceeding from love, but not in a noisy way, as the self-righteous and other sects are noisy. In opposition to their harshest clamor the prophet depicts the office of Christ as being most gentle and mild. This is to cry without being noisy, that is, teach gently without rage. In other partisan groups and judgments and lawsuits there is nothing but accusation and shouting on the part of those who suffer wrong on both sides, and even the judge shouts when he passes sentence. Thus the self-righteous are most turbulent, because all of them are by nature sad and stern, all of them are ready to pass judgment. They measure everything by the standard of their own life and most severely condemn everything else ... This is what it means for a Christian not to raise his voice, that is, in an uproar, but rather in grace. (Luther)

Although He is certain of His divine call, and brings to the nations the highest and the best, His manner of appearing is nevertheless quiet, gentle, and humble; the very opposite of those lying teachers, who endeavored to exalt themselves by noisy demonstrations. He does not seek His own, and therefore denies Himself. He brings what commends itself, and therefore requires no

forced trumpeting. (The more unsure, the louder people speak – Parents, pastors, and teachers who need to remind others who they are usually in trouble or in doubt themselves.) (KD)

Contrast the quiet Servant (cf. Is 53:7) with world conquerors such as Sennacherib (Is. 36) and Cyrus (Is. 41:5), who made loud and arrogant boast about their victories. But the Messiah/King comes as a meek one riding a donkey (Zech. 9:9; Matt 21:5). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 1)

This is quoted by Matthew to explain why Jesus warned crowds not to publicize Him (Mt. 12:16). Jesus did not seek fame, nor did He want second-hand reports to distort the purpose of His mission. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 1)

**Isaiah 42:3** *bruised reed* – Someone who is weak (see Ps 72:2, 4). The servant will mend broken lives. (CSB)

Reeds were used for pens etc. (TLSB)

We move into the area of pastoral care. Wherever He finds men wounded and bruised by the harshness of life's experience, or wherever He finds wounded and bruised consciences, whether among the Gentiles or in Israel, there He is most tender and delicate in the gentle handling of these souls. (Leupold)

*smoldering wick* – The Savior would make use of true pastoral mildness in dealing with hearts which are broken and contrite, not only by not driving them to despair, but by seeking them and caring for them with His full Savior's love. (Kretzmann)

Wicks were made from broken flax fibers that could not be woven properly. Though of little value, these items are still handled carefully by the Servant. Cf. 40:29; 61:1-3.

Where the flame of devotion burns at all, however feebly and dimly, the Messiah will take care not to quench it. Rather He will tend it, and trim it, and give it fresh oil, and cause it to burn more brightly. (PC)

Not only will He not destroy the life that is dying out, but He will actually save it. His course is not to destroy, but to save. (KD)

John 3:16-17, “<sup>16</sup>“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son,<sup>f</sup> that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup>For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”

He cups His hand around the flame that it may not be quenched or as one writer has put it, snuffed out. This will be the manner in which He will faithfully bring forth justice. (Leupold)

This is, brothers who are difficult in their habits, irritable, suspicious, and troublesome, men who see others as pleasant people and regard themselves alone as overcome with despair. Such people Christ also wants to carry. Christian friendship is different from the worldly variety... It is like a hospital, where there are the strong and the weak. The Christian life, therefore, is a mixture of strength and weakness. One supports the other. This is indeed a comforting situation. (Luther)

*faithfulness* – emeth – stability, certainty, truth, trustworthiness. (Strong's)

2 Timothy 2:13, “if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself.”

*justice* – He does not reign by means of weapons and force, still less by craft and guile, but He rules by truth without violence. For that reason the whole world is offended by this kingdom, because it makes its way in weakness. (Lu)

**42:4** *falter* – Cf. 40:28.

Christ Himself will be the best teacher. He will not fail or put on a sour face like the self-righteous, who walk around stoop-shouldered in gray robes. This describes Christ’s personal manner and appearance against their sadness and sour mien, because He says, Matt. 6:16: “Do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces.” A Christian can well be pious and cheerful at the same time. This is said with regard to his person. (Luther)

ESV – grow faint. Though He may become weak and exhausted by “the anguish of His soul” (53:11), He will not give up the struggle. (TLSB)

*In his law ... hope.*† As do the nations in 2:2–4. (CSB)

Law here means more than the OT ceremonial laws or even the Ten Commandments. It means all the revelation about this Servant – His Word, including the gospel. (PBC)

*islands* – This is the longing of the heathen for a deliverance from this present world, unconscious and inarticulate as it is, being satisfied only in the redemption earned and offered by Christ. That this entire paragraph was fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus is plainly stated Matt. 12, 18-21. (Kretzmann)

The Servant’s purpose is to establish salvation on the earth. Even the coast lands, previously zealous for their idols (41:5-7), should wait for the Law (instruction) of the Servant. (TLSB)

He will carry out His work until He has established justice in the earth. But it will not be universal hostility and opposition that He encounters. Grace will have been doing some work on the hearts of men in distant coastlands. So the encouraging word is added for His teaching the coastlands do wait. Sometimes their longing will be dimly and not consciously define. But it will be there, even if at times it is little more than a negative preparation. (Luke 15:1-2) (Leupold)

The isles are the most distant of the Gentile nations and indicate the universal scope of the Servant’s mission. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 1)

**12:15–21** Jesus, the Servant of the Lord, proclaimed justice to all nations, a justice that rightfully condemns sinners. Yet Jesus fulfilled the demands of that justice by His perfect life and innocent death on the cross. We, Christ’s present-day ambassadors, do well to follow His example as we proclaim His message. We will not save anyone by being argumentative and quarrelsome. The Gospel of Christ alone is the power of God for salvation (Rm 1:16). • Grant me patience, Lord, not to quarrel or cry aloud as I share the Gospel with others. Amen. (TLSB)

*Blasphemy Against the Holy Spirit*

**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.

**12:22** *demon-oppressed ... blind and mute* – Another example of how Jesus “healed them all” (v 15). (TLSB)

**12:24** The Pharisees rejected the people’s conclusion and asserted that Jesus’ power to heal had a different source. (TLSB)

*Beelzebub* – The prince of demons (12:24); the Greek form of the Hebrew name Baal-Zebub (“lord of flies”; see 2Ki 1:2), a parody on and mockery of the actual epithet, Baal-Zebul (“Exalted Baal” or “Prince Baal.”); The name came to be used of Satan. (CSB)

The reactions to the miracle are strong and strikingly different. On the one hand, the crowds who are present begin to be astonished, and they wonder aloud about “this one,” that is, about Jesus’ identity. They formulate their question in terms that are firmly rooted in the historical context; they ask whether Jesus is the expected messianic deliverer. “Son of David” is a central to messianic expectation in Judaism at this time. (CC)

On the other hand, the Pharisees reject Jesus and His ministry outright. Concerning the one upon whom God has put His Spirit to bring forth justice even to all nations (12:18-21; cf 3:16-17), they say, “This one is not casting our demons except in connection with Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons! One could hardly imagine harsher words of rejection. Coming hard on the heels of the evangelist’s citation of Isaiah 42:1-4 in Mt 12:18-21, these words show that the Pharisees have set themselves against God’s very plan to put the world right. They cannot deny that Jesus’ ministry is moving with spiritual power, but they attribute that power to Satan. (CC)

**12:25-26** First of four arguments Jesus raised against the Pharisees’ charge. He suggested that their accusation was absurd and self-destructive. Satan would not undercut his own princely dominion. (TLSB)

**12:25** *kingdom divided* – Jesus’ response first rebuts what His opponents have said (12:25-30) by combining common sense and appeal to what His opponents already have seen elsewhere. In what feels very much like a proverb, Jesus declares what is intuitively obvious. (CC)

**12:27** *your judges* – A question arises about whom “your sons” in Jesus’ saying refers. The apparent modern consensus is that Jesus is here speaking of the activities of other Jewish exorcists. (CC)

Attempted expulsion of evil spirits, or demons, is called exorcism and was practiced in the biblical world (Ac 19:11–20) and also today. Jesus’ question and second argument suggested that sons or students of the Pharisees claimed this power. (TLSB)

**12:28** Jesus’ third argument was the bold assertion that He cast out demons by the power of the Holy Spirit. This proved that God’s kingdom was at hand (4:17; 10:7), present in His very person among the unbelieving Pharisees. (TLSB)

**12:29** Jesus’ fourth argument is a brief parable. Jesus pointed out that Satan was very strong and must first be bound before anyone could plunder his house. Only One stronger than Satan can plunder Satan’s household and rescue those held captive by his demonic hosts. Cf Col 1:13–14. (TLSB)

**12:30** *not with Me is against Me* – Although directed specifically against the Pharisees, this general principle stands for all time. There is no middle ground when it comes to being either for or against Jesus (Rv 3:15–16). Hus: “Men may easily recognize the wicked by their outward works which are contrary to Christ; but the good cannot be so known because hypocrisy may lurk in them” (*The Church*, p 160). (TLSB)

**12:31** *Therefore I tell you* – What Jesus said to the Pharisees was a solemn warning to beware of blaspheming the Holy Spirit. (TLSB)

*blasphemy*. Extreme slander or curse of the deity. OT law pronounced death (no forgiveness) on anyone who blasphemed God (Lv 24:16). This was the charge against Jesus that led to His crucifixion (Mt 26:65–66). (TLSB)

*blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgive* – The context (vv. 24, 28, 32) suggests that the “unpardonable sin” was attributing to Satan Christ’s authenticating miracles done in the power of the Holy Spirit. (CSB)

*against the Spirit will not be forgiven* – Jesus declared that those who slandered Him as a human being could be forgiven, but those who called His miracles “the devil’s work” were blaspheming the Holy Spirit and could not be forgiven. The Holy Spirit is true God. No one who worries about having committed this unforgivable sin is guilty of it. (TLSB)

In context, Jesus is not addressing Christians who might commit the unforgivable sin and fall irrevocably away from the faith. He is warning His enemies that they have set themselves on the road to perdition. (CC)

He begins 12:31 with hyperbole that is so self-evidently an exaggeration that commentators rarely take explicit note: “because of this I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men.” These words cannot be taken literally, for Jesus Himself is about to contradict them. To make the two clauses of 12:31 fit, the first would have to read like this: “...every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven to men except one.” Everyone knows that not every sin will be forgiven; those who do not want God’s forgiveness in Christ will not obtain it, even though it is available for all. (CC)

To be against Jesus, however, is at the same time to blaspheme the Spirit. For God Himself, through Holy Scripture, foretold that He would put His Spirit upon His Servant so that He might announce justice to the nations (Is. 44:1-4, quoted in MT 12:18-21). To blaspheme the Spirit is also to reject the Father Himself, who pronounced His pleasure over His only Son, upon whom the Spirit descended when He was baptized (3:13-17). The meaning of 12:31 is this: God in

Christ is ready to forgive one and all. Those, however, who by their speech set themselves against and reject the one triune God – the Son, the Spirit, and the Father – will not be forgiven. A person who renounces Christ will not be forgiven – unless he repents and confesses Jesus. The blasphemy against the Spirit nothing more or less than an ongoing rejection of Jesus. (CC)

The sin against the Holy Spirit is directed against the work the Holy Spirit is doing in the heart of the person committing the sin. It consists in this that such a person from sheer spite and malice rejects and blasphemes those truths of which the Holy Spirit is convincing or has convinced him. If a man blasphemes divine truth of which he is not convinced in his heart, he has not committed this sin. If he is convinced, and he rejects and blasphemes them from fear of men, as did Peter, from love of the world, from pride, selfishness, self-righteousness, the unpardonable sin has not yet been committed, for it is possible that all these are eventually overcome by the influence of the Holy Spirit. When pure contrariness, spite, and malice against the Holy Spirit, whose influence he feels in his heart, dictates his action, then it is simply impossible for the Holy Spirit to win that person; for every attempt to draw him to Christ is resisted with more vehement malice and blasphemy. (A Summary of Christian Doctrine – Edward W. A. Koehler)

In Matthew 12 Jesus casts out a devil. The Pharisees had to recognize it as the work of God. But they said that Jesus was devil casting out devils. Christ warns them, lest their hatred of him could turn to spite and malice could wind up resisting the Holy Spirit. He does not say that they had actually committed this sin. (A Summary of Christian Doctrine – Edward W. A. Koehler)

We should not charge anyone with this sin, since we do not know whether or not a person is really of the truth he blasphemes, nor can we tell whether he is doing it from spite and malice; we cannot look into his heart. Those who are disturbed in their minds that they might have committed this sin, have definitely not committed it, because their very fear proves there is no spite and malice in their hearts. (A Summary of Christian Doctrine – Edward W. A. Koehler)

The reason why this sin cannot be forgiven is not that it is too great – though great it is – but that it makes repentance impossible, since it is directed against every effort of the Holy Spirit to convert man. (A Summary of Christian Doctrine – Edward W. A. Koehler)

**12:32** *speaks against* – Synonym for blasphemy. (TLSB)

*either in this age ... to come* – Forceful way of saying “never.” (TLSB)

**12:22–32** The Pharisees claim that Beelzebul, the prince of demons, has enabled Jesus to overpower demons. This leads Jesus to declare: “Whoever is not with Me is against Me” (v 30). One cannot be neutral in spiritual matters. To be indifferent or apathetic about Jesus is to be on the side of those who refuse to confess that He is the Messiah. He alone saves the world from sin, death, and the power of the devil. • Lord Jesus Christ, continue to send Your Holy Spirit through Word and Sacrament to strengthen my faith in You as my only Savior. Amen. (TLSB)

**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.”**

**12:33** *tree is known by its fruit* – Words one speaks (cf v 32) are fruit that determine whether one is good or bad. (TLSB)

**12:34** *brood of vipers!* Pharisees. (TLSB)

*out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks* – “The First Commandment has instructed the heart and taught the faith. This commandment now leads us forward and directs the mouth and tongue to God. For the first things that spring from the heart and show themselves are words” (LC I 50). (TLSB)

**12:35** *good treasure ... evil treasure* – Speech reveals character: good from good; bad from bad. (TLSB)

**12:36** *careless word* – Gk adjective means “lazy, idle (KJV), insignificant.” Jesus possibly had in mind the Pharisees’ remark that He cast out demons by Beelzebul (v 24). He warned that they would be held accountable for this word on the Day of Judgment. (TLSB)

**12:37** *you will be justified* – Jesus spoke these final words not just to the Pharisees but to all hearers (and readers). Each individual is accountable for the words that flow from one’s heart. They prove a person either righteous or guilty. However, cf Rom 10:10. (TLSB)

**12:33–37** Jesus reminds us that words are important. Good words come from good hearts, and evil words come from evil hearts. What do our words tell others about our hearts? James said quite a bit about controlling our tongues (Jas 3:1–12). Such control begins with a repentant heart. Only faith in Jesus, the Word of God, produces good hearts, from which flow words of praise and confession. • Guard my mouth, O Lord, from speaking words that would detract others from Your truth. Amen. (TLSB)

### *The Sign of Jonah*

**38** Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, “Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.” **39** But he answered them, “**An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. 40 For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. 41 The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. 42 The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.**”

**12:38** *teacher* – In Matthew, Jesus’ disciples always address Him as “Lord” (kurie). Hagner, Matthew, 1:353, observes that the address of these scribes and Pharisees “suggests a resistance to Jesus and His proclamation and a refusal to follow in discipleship to Him. (CC)

*miraculous sign* – The Pharisees wanted to see a spectacular miracle, preferably in the sky (see Lk 11:16), as the sign that Jesus was the Messiah. Instead, he cites them a “sign” from history. (CSB)

The Jewish legal scholars asked for some compelling miracle to verify Jesus’ messianic claims. The healing of the demon-oppressed man was not sufficient for them (v 22). (TLSB)



Scholars commonly assume that these leaders are showing an appalling and arbitrary lack of insight and discernment. Even though they have already witnessed powerful miracles from Jesus (such as the exorcism in 12:22), they have the gall to seek a greater sign that would provide some sort of undeniable, overwhelming proof that Jesus is who He claims to be. Linton claims that this is the common consensus of opinion among commentators. (CC)

Linton, “Demand for a Sign,” 113-15, observes that common features of this communis opinio (“commonly held opinion”) include that the requested sign would be “a miracle of a higher order” that “without any doubt” would “verify a Messianic claim.” (CC)

The sign in these situations is simply one that can be verified relatively quickly, and it functions to legitimate the larger claim that hangs in the background. (CC)

In Ex 4:1-9, the miraculous “signs” were intended to convince the Israelites that God had sent Moses to lead them out of Egypt. However, God anticipated that the Israelites might not believe the message that was to be verified by these signs. In any event, the signs were small compared to the far more powerful miracles that God would perform during the plagues, the exodus itself, and Sinai revelation. (CC)

What the scribes and Pharisees are requesting of Jesus in Mt 12:38, then is that He predict a discernable sign in the near future. If the sign were to happen, it would validate the claims that Jesus has made about Himself, most particularly that He is casting out demons in connection with God’s Spirit and that through His ministry, the reign of God has come upon the land. (CC)

Zechariah – Mary – Joseph – Gideon – Abraham – Mark 9:14-29

**12:39** *adulterous* – Referring to spiritual, not physical, adultery, in the sense that their generation had become unfaithful to its spiritual husband (God). (CSB)

Jesus described His contemporaries with a term often used by OT prophets (Jer 3:8; 13:27; Ezk 16:15). (TLSB)

*seeks for a sign* – To seek a sign from Jesus after all He had already done revealed the spiritual impurity and wickedness of these religious leaders. Like Satan, they wanted Jesus to certify that He was the Son of God (4:3, 6). This certification would come in the sign of Jonah (v 40). (TLSB)

*sign of Jonah* – Jewish literature in the Second Temple period paid a fair amount of attention to the prophet Jonah. (CC)

**12:40** *Son of Man* – Jesus cites what happened to Jonah as a preview of His own death, burial, and resurrection. Jonah was the only OT prophet to whom Jesus directly compared Himself. (TLSB)

*three days and three nights* – Including at least part of the first day and part of the third day, a common Jewish reckoning of time. (CSB)

The significance of the “three days and three nights” is that after Jonah spent this time in the fish’s belly, he then came out again to new life on the dry land. The sign of Jonah the prophet, then, is Jesus’ resurrection. (CC)

Jesus' resurrection, then, is the sign of Jonah. What can – and will – validate the claims that Jesus is making about Himself and His ministry? It will be the great overwhelming fact that His death will not endure; on the third day He will rise to resurrection of life. (CC)

I cheerfully confess to my reader that I wrote these words, I thought of the tombstone inscription that I have told my wife to put on my tombstone, should I have the need for one: “this is only a temporary setback.” (CC)

It is uncertain whether, at this time in His earthly ministry, any of His opponents (or disciples for that matter) understood the significance of Jesus' words. (CC)

Chow, Sing of *Jonah Reconsidered*, 65, thinks that the Pharisees later show that they did understand by the fact that they request a guard at Jesus' tomb. He observes: Matthew 12:40 is the only place where the passion is announced to the public – Pharisees and scribes alike. The relation of Matthew 12:38-40 to 27:62-66 and 28:11-15 shows that, by rejecting the resurrection of Jesus, His opponents are blind to only sing available to them.” (CC)

*great fish* – The Greek word does not mean “whale” but rather “sea creature,” i.e., a huge fish (see note on Jnh 1:17). (CSB)

**12:41–42** *one greater than Jonah ... one greater than Solomon*. See note on Lk 11:31–32 – (Jesus argued from the lesser to the greater. If the queen of Sheba responded positively to the wisdom of Solomon, and the men of Nineveh to the preaching of Jonah, how much more should the people of Jesus' day have responded to the ministry of Jesus, who is infinitely greater than Solomon or Jonah!) (CSB)

**12:41** *men of Nineveh ... condemn* – These Gentiles repented because of Jonah's preaching; on Judgment Day, they will condemn unbelievers for rejecting Jesus. (TLSB)

*something greater* – Jesus was a greater prophet than Jonah (cf 10:1; 12:6). (TLSB)

**12:42** *Queen of the South* – In 1Ki 10:1 she is called the queen of Sheba, a country in southwest Arabia, now called Yemen. (CSB)

The queen of Sheba, a Gentile, traveled great distances to hear Solomon's wisdom (1Ki 10:1–10). What she sought, a great king and sage, was surpassed by Jesus, the messianic King who will sit at the Father's right hand (Col 3:1; Heb 12:2). She also will condemn the contemporaries of Jesus at the final judgment. (TLSB)

According to Chow, *Sign of Jonah Reconsidered*, 63, Jewish literature regards both the Ninevites and the Queen of the South/Sheba as “symbols of wickedness.” The biblical text, of course states that the Ninevites “believe in God” (Jonah 3:5), which indicates genuine repentance and saving faith according to Lessing, *Jonah* 283-85, 299-307, who cites various other Christian interpreters and the Lutheran Confessions (Ap XII 165-66). Similarly, the Queen of Sheba upon her visit confessed that she now believed what she heard about the wisdom God had given Solomon. Moreover, she praised Yahweh, the God of Israel, and honored the sovereign with gifts (1 Ki 10:6-10). Her responses too suggest saving faith in the one true God. (CC)

*condemn* – On the Day of Judgment, therefore, these heathen people will rise in accusation against the Jewish nation and their leaders. They will bring a formal charge and complaint, and

show them to be guilty in their rejection of Christ. In the same way the great queen that came to see Solomon and hear his wisdom, 1 Kings 10, will appear before the tribunal of God on the last day and add her testimony to that of the Ninevites for the condemnation of the Jews. From a far country, from Arabia Felix, she came to hear the wisdom of a mere man. But here the eternal Wisdom from on high was expounding the counsel of God from eternity, and yet that generation rejected Man and message. (K)

Those who have greater opportunities and richer blessings have greater responsibilities, and they have greater guilt when they fail to appreciate their blessings or to accept their responsibilities. The more you receive from God, the more God expects from you. (PBC)

Return of an Unclean Spirit

**43 “When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, but finds none. 44 Then it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when it comes, it finds the house empty, swept, and put in order. 45 Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there, and the last state of that person is worse than the first. So also will it be with this evil generation.”**

**12:38–42** The people of Nineveh heard Jonah, and the queen of Sheba saw Solomon. But greater than either that prophet or that king is our Lord Jesus Christ. We are privileged to hear and receive Him in His Word. Sometimes, like the unbelieving leaders, we seek signs of God’s goodness in success, wealth, and health. One sign is sufficient for faith, the sign of Jonah. In this sign we find peace, joy, and hope. • O Jesus, my Prophet, Priest, and King, accept the praise I bring because You revealed to me the sign of salvation. Amen. (TLSB)

**12:43–45** Jesus is perhaps referring to the work of Jewish exorcists, who claimed to cast out demons (cf. v. 19) but who rejected the kingdom of God and whose exorcisms were therefore ineffective. (CSB)

With this parable, Jesus returned to the subject of demonic possession (vv 22, 27). (TLSB)

The danger which they incur lies in the circumstance that they constantly grow worse. Contempt for their release from the evil one will thrust them more than ever into the clutches of the enemy. This is the underlying concept in the parable of the unclean spirit and the seven other spirits. In the Kingdom of God there is a law of the Word, he is no longer what he was before the hearing of the Word. If a person does not progress, he must unavoidably retrogress. Truly momentous is therefore the hour when Jesus approaches us in His Word. Either we must permit Him to embrace us or we shall inevitably be embraced by an unreceptive and insusceptible spirit toward His grace. So it was with the Jews. Their end was worse than the beginning. Under the judgment of God, they are dispersed in all the lands of the earth. (Ylvisaker)

Jesus intends to warn His contemporaries who have rejected Him. We may suppose that Matthew intends Jesus’ words to apply to any and all who read this Gospel with hearts that stubbornly reject the claims of Jesus. Unless people repent, however, and embrace and follow Jesus as the Christ empowered by the Spirit of God, their final spiritual condition will be far worse than it had been before. (CC)

**12:43** *passes through waterless places* – People in Jesus’ day believed that evil spirits inhabited desert places (cf 4:1). If they found no resting place there, they would seek out some human habitation. (TLSB)

**12:44** *house* – Person who formerly had the demon. (TLSB)

*empty* – When a state of neutrality exists, when a person is neither for or against Christ (v 30), the demon regains possession. Emptiness invites occupation. (TLSB)

*swept and put in order*. Evil spirits brought chaos and destruction when they possessed a person. Once liberated of that possession, however, the person behaved normally (cf 8:35). (TLSB)

**12:45** Jesus applied the parable to His contemporaries who refused to acknowledge Him as God’s chosen Servant (v 18). They were missing an opportunity to amend their sinful lives and would end up being condemned at the final judgment (vv 41–42). (TLSB)

*last state* – After the second possession. “He also will punish those who willfully turn away from the holy commandment and again entangle themselves in the world’s filth (2 Peter 2:20–21), decorate their hearts for Satan (Luke 11:24–26), and despise God’s Spirit (Hebrews 10:29)” (FC SD XI 83). (TLSB)

**12:43–45** Jesus describes how a person delivered from a demon becomes worse when there is failure to fill the emptiness with goodness. We can also relapse into old and habitual sins when we fail to nourish our spiritual lives through Word and Sacrament. Only the Holy Spirit can replace the evil spirits that are constantly “seeking someone to devour” (1Pt 5:8). With words from Luther’s baptismal service, we cry out: “Depart thou unclean spirit and make room for the Holy Spirit” (AE 53:107). • Come, Holy Spirit, and make my heart Your dwelling place. Amen. (TLSB)

*Jesus’ Mother and Brothers*

**46 While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him 48 But he replied to the man who told him, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” 49 And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! 50 For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”**

**12:46** *mother and brothers* – The family, thinking he was “out of his mind,” probably wanted to get him away from his heavy schedule. *brothers*. Did not believe in Jesus at this time (Jn 7:5). Various interpretations concerning their relationship to Jesus arose in the early church: They were sons of Joseph by a previous marriage (according to Epiphanius) or were cousins (said Jerome). The most natural conclusion (suggested by Helvidius) is that they were the sons of Joseph and Mary, younger half brothers of Jesus. Four of these brothers are named in Mk 6:3, where sisters are also mentioned. Since Joseph is not mentioned here, it is likely that he had died. (CSB)

Of all human relationships, none can be as important as the family relationship to Jesus that comes through being His disciple. It is not the ambivalent crowds nor relatives according natural relationship to Him – His brothers with whom He was raised in Nazareth and even His own mother, who gave birth to Him – but only and all those who are His disciples who are members of His family. (CC)

Luke 12:49-53, “<sup>49</sup>“I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! <sup>50</sup>But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed! <sup>51</sup>Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. <sup>52</sup>From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. <sup>53</sup>They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”

**12:49** The spiritual family of believers took priority for Jesus over His earthly family. (TLSB)

**12:50** *whoever does the will of my Father* – Membership in God’s spiritual family, evidenced by obedience to him, is more important than membership in our human families. (CSB)

To do the Father’s will includes believing (Jn 6:29). By doing what pleases the Father, we identify ourselves as members of the family of Jesus (7:20–21). (TLSB)

This phrase should be understood holistically, in reference to the life of discipleship. In the first place, Jesus’ disciples do the will of the Father when they acknowledge who Jesus is: the Lord of the Sabbath, the one who is greater than the temple, and the one in whom God’s Spirit works now and on the Last Day. In the second place and consequently, Jesus’ disciples do the will of the Father by following this one into a life of light shining and salt-spreading (5:29, 40). (CC)

Christ does not intend His disciples to reject their natural family relations or neglect the duties \* thereof, but to place them (and all things) in their proper perspective. (CC)

\*Mark 7:11, “And he said to them: “You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! <sup>10</sup>For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and, ‘Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.’ <sup>11</sup>But you say that if a man says to his father or mother: ‘Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban’ (that is, a gift devoted to God), <sup>12</sup>then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. <sup>13</sup>Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that.”

*Corban*. The transliteration of a Hebrew word meaning “offering.” By using this word in a religious vow an irresponsible Jewish son could formally dedicate to God (i.e., to the temple) his earnings that otherwise would have gone for the support of his parents. The money, however, did not necessarily have to go for religious purposes. The Corban formula was simply a means of circumventing the clear responsibility of children toward their parents as prescribed in the law. The teachers of the law held that the Corban oath was binding, even when uttered rashly. The practice was one of many traditions that adhered to the letter of the law while ignoring its spirit. (*that is, a gift devoted to God*). By explaining this Hebrew word, Mark reveals that he is addressing Gentile readers, probably Romans primarily. (CSB)

**12:46–50** Jesus’ family comes to speak with Him, but He gently rebuffs them in order to make the point that all Christians are His sisters, brothers, and mother. None of us deserves to be included in this sacred relationship. But our Savior’s arms, once extended on the cross, now embrace us with His forgiving love and empowering grace. • My Brother, Jesus, assure me of Your presence, and guide me as I seek to do my Father’s will. Amen. (TLSB)