

Matthew 12 Commentary-C H Spurgeon

PREVIOUS

NEXT

MATTHEW 12:1-13 OUR KING AS LORD OF THE SABBATH

Matthew 12:1,2. AT that time Jesus went on the sabbath day through the corn; and his disciples were an hungered, and began, to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat. But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto to him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day

They were probably on their way to the synagogue. They were allowed by law to take ears of corn as they passed along; but the objection of the Pharisees was to their doing so on the Sabbath. Plucking was reaping, rubbing the grain from the husk was threshing, to their hypercritical minds.

Their traditions and fancies they regarded as a code of law, and according to this the disciples were doing "that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day." They came to Jesus himself with their grave complaints: for once they plucked up courage to deal with the Leader; for they felt very strong on the Sabbath question, and they thought it fair to lay the faults of the disciples at the door of their Teacher.

We incidentally learn from this story that our Lord and his disciples were poor, and that he who fed the multitudes did not use his miraculous power to feed his own followers, but left them till they did what poor men are forced to do to supply a little stay for their stomachs. Our Lord bribes none into following him: they may be his apostles, and yet be hungry on a Sabbath.

Why did not these Pharisees give them bread, and so prevent their doing that to which they objected? We might also fairly ask, How came they to see the disciples? Did they not break the Sabbath by setting a watch over them?

Matthew 12:3, 4. But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungered, and they that were with him; how he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests?

He speaks to his learned opponents as if they had not read the law which they professed to uphold. "Have ye not read?" The instance of David served the Son of David well. It was clear from his example that necessity has no law. The Tabernacle law was broken by David when he and his band were pressed with hunger; and that breach of law touched Jewish ritual in a very special and tender point, and yet he was never rebuked for it. To have eaten the holy bread out of profanity, or bravado, or levity, might have involved the offender in the judgment of death; but to do so in urgent need was not blameworthy in the case of David. As men excuse any breach of manners necessitated by the pressure of hunger, so cloth the Lord permit any ceremonial point of law to give way to his mercy, and to man's evident necessity. The law of the Sabbath was never meant to compel starvation to hungry men, any more than the law of "the house of God" and "the shewbread." Works of necessity are lawful on the Sabbath.

Matthew 12:5, 6. Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless, But I say unto you, That in this place is one greater than the temple .

This instance is absolutely to the point. The priests worked hard on the Sabbath in offering sacrifice, and in other appointed ways; but they were to be honored rather than censured for so doing, seeing they had the approval of the temple law. But in the case of Christ's disciples, that which they did had the sanction of the temple's Lord, who is far greater than the temple.

Work done for God on the Sabbath is no real profanation of the Sabbath, though it may seem to be so to those whose religion lies wholly in external observances. If we work with Jesus, and for Jesus, we care not for the criticisms of formalists. As the substance is greater than the shadow, so is our Lord greater than the temple, or any or all ceremonial laws; and his sanction overrules all the interpretations of the law which asceticism or superstition may thrust upon us.

Works of piety are lawful on the Sabbath 7. But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless.

Our Lord had galled the Pharisees by saying twice, "Have ye not read? " Did he imagine that they had left any part of the Psalms or Law unread?

Now he assails them again with the charge of ignorance of the meaning of a passage from the prophets: "If ye had known what this meaneth. " Then he quotes from Hosea 6:6, which he had used against them before. (See chapter 9:13.) "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice. " There must be very much in this word of the prophet to make it so great a favorite with our Lord. God preferred that his priests should rather give the consecrated shewbread to David as an act of mercy, than keep it sacred to its use: he would rather that the disciples should spend a few minutes in plucking ears of corn for their hunger than suffer faintness in order to preserve the sanctity of the day. Having thus the permit of the Lord himself, those who allowed the merciful act of removing hunger were guiltless, and ought not to be condemned. Indeed, they would not have been condemned had their critics been better instructed.

Works of mercy are lawful on the Sabbath.

Matthew 12:8. For the Son of man is lord even of the sabbath day.

This sets the whole matter beyond further question. "The Son of man ", Christ Jesus, being in union with the Godhead, "is Lord " of everything which lies in the range of that law which concerns God and man, seeing he is Mediator; and therefore he may arrange and dispose of Sabbaths as he pleases. He has done so, and has interpreted the Sabbatic law, not with license, but with a sweet reasonableness which the more rigid of religionists do not exhibit. From his example and teaching we learn that the Sabbath is not profaned by works of necessity, piety, or mercy; and that we need not care for the sharp speeches of hypercritical formalists who strain the Sabbatic law, and make a bondage of that which was intended to be a season of holy rest.

Matthew 12:9. And when he was departed thence, he went into their synagogue.

The time arrived when the Sabbath question came up again in reference to our Lord's own work among the sick and diseased.

Jesus set the example of attending public worship. The synagogues had no divine appointment to authorize them, but in the nature of things it must be right and good to meet for the worship of God on his own day, and therefore Jesus was there. He had nothing to learn, yet he went up to the assembly on the day which the Lord God had hallowed.

Matthew 12:10. And, behold, there was a man which had his hand withered. And they asked him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days? that they might accuse him.

The incident was noteworthy, and therefore it is mentioned with a "behold. " It was remarkable that so very soon a case occurred to bring up again the matter in dispute. Did the Pharisees bring the man with the withered hand into the synagogue so as to raise the question in a practical form? They went to the synagogue to indulge their bigotry and not to worship: it is to be feared that many in these days imitate then,. Before our Lord made any motion towards a miracle, they were at him with what they hoped would prove an entangling question. "Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days? " He had claimed to be Lord of the Sabbath; and now they, with much show of fairness, submit a difficulty to him, but it was with a base purpose. In the moral character of questioning, everything depends upon the motive they did not ask that they might learn from him, but "that they might accuse him. " They were on the catch; yet they took nothing by their malicious craft.

Matthew 12:11, 12. And he said unto them, What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold of it, and lift it out? How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days.

He answers their question by another. He propounds a case, and makes them to be judges in it. If a poor man, with "one sheep ", saw it fall "into a pit ", or become cast on its back "on the sabbath ", would he not "lay hold on it, and lift it out ", and set it on its feet? Of course he would; and he would be right in so doing. How much then is a man better than a sheep? therefore it is and must be right to succor a man. Alas, some act as if a man were not better than an animal; for their dogs and horses are better

housed than their laborers, and they are more indignant about the killing of a fox than at the starving of a pauper.

Our Lord's argument was overwhelming. One form of human kindness being proved to be right, the whole class of beneficent actions is admitted, and "it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days." One wonders that anybody ever thought otherwise. But zeal for externals, and hatred of spiritual religion, when united, create a narrow bigotry as cruel as it is ridiculous. Our Lord has set us free from the Rabbinical yoke, and we find rest unto our souls in a true spiritual Sabbath. Let none, however, from this liberty, infer a license, and treat the Lord's-day as if it were their own, and might be spent for their own purposes. They best keep the Sabbath who on the seventh day, and always, rest from their own works, as God did from his; but how can a man rest until he knows the finished work of God in Christ Jesus?

Matthew 12:13. Then saith he to the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it forth; and it was restored whole, like as the other.

Thus our Lord practically carried out his own teaching. He that could work a miracle of this sort was divine, and could rightly interpret his own law.

The man was sitting down, and Jesus bade him stand up that all might observe him; and then he further bade him hold up his hand so that all could see its lifeless condition. It does not appear that his arm was withered, as some have supposed; but he was able, by the use of his arm to hold out his hand to public view. This being done, the Lord restored it at once, before the whole synagogue, and before the captious Pharisees. The man stretched out each finger perfectly restored to its natural vigor. The poor man had hidden his hand when it was dried up; but when restored, it was meet that it should be seen by all in the synagogue. By that restored hand, made whole on the sabbath, all men knew that Jesus would work deeds of mercy on the sabbath. Let us pray him to do the same in our assemblies. Oh, that the hands which have been useless for holy purposes may at his bidding become whole! Oh, that those who are bidden to believe and live would cease from questioning, and obey, as this man did; then would healing his surely come to them, as it did to the obedient man!

MATTHEW 12:14-21 OUR KING IN THE MAJESTY OF HIS PEACEFULNESS

Matthew 12:14. Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him.

The synagogue was too hot for the Pharisees, and so they went out. Utterly routed, they retire from public gaze, hating the man who had so completely baffled them. They could not silence him, and so they would slay him.

Those who begin with seeking to accuse the Lord soon come to seeking to destroy him. It was not easy to touch one who lived so much in the esteem of the people, and so they consulted together as to the safest method of procedure. Their killing of Jesus was indeed the result of malice aforethought, for they deliberately, planned their cruel deed. Men at this hour still take counsel "against him." Why and wherefore? Let their own consciences answer, if they have any. The present cool, calculating attacks of skeptics upon the gospel have a special degree of crime in them.

Matthew 12:15, 16. But when Jesus knew it, he withdrew himself from thence: and great multitudes followed him, and he healed them, all; and charged them, that they should not make him known.

Their secret counsels were all discerned by his omniscience: Jesus knew it.

He acted accordingly. He came not to contend with cavilers, and therefore he withdrew himself from the scene of their perpetual disputations. But he could not get alone; the crowd flocked after him, and his love could not refuse to bless them with healing. He did not want to create an excitement, and so, when the people gathered in multitudes, he commanded them not to advertise his presence. To him popularity became a hindrance in his work, and he shunned it. In this avoidance of notoriety he fulfilled an ancient prophecy.

We are under no charge to conceal his gracious wonders, and therefore we would joyfully enlarge upon that glorious record, "He healed them all." What an encouragement to sin-sick souls to bunt in him!

Matthew 12:17-19. That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall shew judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not strive, nor cry, neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets.

It is in Isaiah 42:1-4 that we read words which are quoted in their full sense, if not literally, by the Evangelist. The Servant of God, elect, beloved, and delightsome to the Lord, clothed with the Spirit of God, would come forth, and reveal the Lord's mind to the nations; but it would not be with tumult and turmoil, noise and clamor.

To avoid contention and ostentation, our Lord quieted those whom he had healed, or at least charged them not to make him known. Our Lord did not aim at raising himself in the esteem of the multitude by successfully contending with the Pharisees; for his method was of another sort. The names given to the Savior here are exceedingly precious, and worthy of our careful meditation, and especially so in connection with the passage in Isaiah. Jesus is the chosen of Jehovah, ordained to be his servant, beloved in that capacity, and well pleasing to his Father. The power of this beloved Servant of God would lie in the divine Spirit, in the doctrine which he would teach, and in the law which he would proclaim; his whole life being a judging and condemnation of sin before the eyes of all men. Not by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit of the Lord, and the force of truth, would he prevail. The wrath of man in hot controversy, the frenzy of wild rhetoric, the torrent of popular declamation; all these he left to mere pretenders: he disdained such weapons in establishing his Kingdom.

Certain of his followers have taken an opposite course, and are much enamored of clamorous and blatant methods: in this they will yet find that they are not well pleasing to the Lord.

Matthew 12:20. A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory.

He left the bruised reed of Pharisaic presence to prove its own impotence, it was not at that time worth his while to break it; and the smoking flax of a nominal religiousness he passed by, and left all dealing with it till another day, when the hour should come to end its offensiveness. He will in the end victoriously judge those hypocrites who were useless as bruised reeds, and offensive as smoking flax; but he would not do this during his first mission to men. He is in no haste to destroy every petty opposition.

This I take to be the exact sense of the words in this connection; but as the passage is popularly received, it is equally true, and much richer in consolation. The feeblest are not disdained by our Lord Jesus, though apparently useless as a bruised reed, or even actually offensive as a smoking flax. He is gentle, and exercises no harsh severity. He bears and forbears with those who are unlovely in his eyes. He longs to bind up the broken reed, and fan the smoking, flax into flaming life. Oh, that poor sinners would remember this, and trust him!

Matthew 12:21. And in his name shall the Gentiles trust.

Because he is so kind, the despised Gentile dogs shall come and crouch at his feet and love him as their Master. He shall be the hope of those who were left as hopeless. Our Lord's desire for quiet, and his avoiding antagonism, thus proved him to be the Messiah of the prophets. Shall we not more and more trust in the Anointed of the Lord? Yes, Gentiles as we are, we do trust in his name. In us is this prophecy fulfilled Yet how unlikely it seemed that Gentiles would do so when Israel refused him.

MATTHEW 12:22-37 OUR KING AND THE POWERS OF DARKNESS

Matthew 12:22. Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw.

It is well when men take to bringing others to Jesus: good is sure to come of it. An extraordinary case exhibited a novel form of the

handicraft of Satan. The evil spirit had secured himself by stopping up the windows and the door of the soul: the victim was blind and dumb. How could he escape? He could not see his Savior, nor cry to him. But the double evil vanished when, in an instant, Jesus dislodged the demon: "the blind and dumb both spake and saw. " When Satan is dethroned, the spiritual faculties begin to work at once. Nothing baffles our Lord. Men who neither see their sin, nor cry for mercy, his grace can save.

Lord, be with us when we preach, and cast out devils by thy Word; then shall moral inability be succeeded by gracious health.

Matthew 12:23. And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David?

Again and again we have noticed their astonishment; and here a question was asked which may have been the footfall of coming faith in many. Our Revised Version very properly leaves out the "not. " It was natural for the translators to put it in, for it looks as if many must have seen the true Solomon in this great Wonderworker. But as it is not in the original, we must not allow the "not "; and then the question shows how strangely unbelieving they were, and yet how some conviction forced itself on them. "Is he? He cannot be; he must be; but is he? Is this the Son of David? " There were various voices, yet the people were one in their wonderment: all the people were amazed!.

Matthew 12:24. But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils.

This was their former concoction It was old and stale, yet for lack of a better or more bitter suggestion, they stick to it. Our Lord was too busy to reply to the vile slander on its first appearance (Matthew 9:34); or perhaps he so loathed it that he would not touch it, but left the abominable thing to poison itself with its own venom. Now they bring it out again, and come to minuter detail of lying by mentioning Beelzebub as the name of the prince of the devils, with whom he was in league. Lies grow as they move on. Those who doubt God's work in the conversion of sinners, soon advance in hardihood, and ascribe the blessed change to hypocrisy, self-interest, madness, or some other evil influence.

Matthew 12:25, 26. And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand: and if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand?

The Thought-reader meets them with an argument in the highest degree conclusive, overwhelming them by reducing their statement to absurdity.

Imagine Satan divided against Satan, and his kingdom thus rent with civil war! No: whatever faults the devils have, they are not at strife with each other; that fault is reserved for the servants of a better Master. Oh, that divisions in the church were not so many, and so desolating as they are! It would be a very hopeful circumstance if we could hear of divisions among the powers of darkness; for then would Satan's kingdom fall. No, ye cunning Pharisees; your slanderous suggestion is too manifestly a lie, and reasonable men are not to be entrapped by it!

Matthew 12:27. And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? therefore they shall be your judges.

Our Lord here used an argument fitted for the men he dealt with. It was not so forcible in itself as the former one, but as an argument to them it would come home with singular force. Some of the disciples of the Pharisees, and probably some of their children, acted as exorcists; and, whether truly or falsely, professed to cast out devils. If Jesus wrought this marvel by Beelzebub, and the Pharisees had made that discover, how could they have learned it better than from their own sons? Did their sons have dealings with the demon-prince? This would impale them on the horns of a dilemma, and prevent their uttering that malicious invention again, for the sake of their own friends.

Matthew 12:28. But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God then the kingdom of God is come unto you.

Our Lord in effect says — If I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then is a new era begun: the divine power has come into distinct conflict with the evil one, and is manifestly victorious. In my person is “the kingdom of God ” inaugurated, and you are placed in a position of gracious advantage by my being among you. But if the devils be not cast out by the Spirit of God, the throne of God is not among you, and you are grievous losers. The overthrow of evil is a clear proof that the kingdom of grace has come.

Note that, though our Lord had power all his own, he honored the Spirit of God, and worked by his energy, and mentioned the fact that he did so.

What can we do without that Spirit? Lord God the Holy Ghost, teach us to wait on thee!

Matthew 12:29. Or else-how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house.

The devil is the strong man, the giant robber. He holds men in possession as a warrior horde his property. There is no getting his goods from him without first encountering himself. The bare idea of spoiling him while you are his friend, or he is unsubdued, is ridiculous. Our Lord, when his work began, bound Satan: the presence of God in human flesh was a restraint upon man's foe. Having bound the enemy, he now takes out of his house those spoils which else had been for ever in his possession. There is no deliverance for us save by our Lord's victory over our powerful tyrant.

Glory be to his name, he has bound the mighty, and he takes from him his prey! This was our Lord's fair and self-evident explanation of the matter concerning which Pharisees theorized so basely.

Matthew 12:30. He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.

Our Lord had made no compromise with Satan. Satan was not with him but against him . He meant to be equally decisive in his dealings with all other parties. Men must either come to his side, or be reckoned as his opponents; there can be no middle course. Jesus meant war with the great enemy, and with all who sided with evil. Men would of necessity practically take sides: their actions would tend to gather to him or to scatter from him.

Jesus is the one and only possible center of human unity; and whatever teaching does not unite men in him, disperses them through selfishness, pride, hate, and a thousand other disintegrating forces. Our King has thrown down the gage of battle, and he will never accept truce or compromise. Lord, let me never hesitate, but be with thee, and gather with thee.

Matthew 12:31. Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.

Here is a solemn warning for these slanderous Pharisees: the sin of reviling the Spirit of God, and imputing his work to Beelzebub, is a very great one; and, in fact, so hardens the heart that men who are guilty of it never repent, and consequently are never forgiven. Our Lord let his opponents see whither they were drifting: they were on the verge of a sin for which no pardon would be possible. We must be very tender in our conduct towards “the Holy Ghost ”; for his honor has a special guard set about it by such a solemn text as this.

Matthew 12:32. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.

Why should a word be spoken against Jesus? Yet many words are so spoken, and he forgives. But when it comes to willfully confounding the Holy Spirit with the evil spirit, the offense is rank, and heinous, and most hardening to the heart. In no state of

the divine economy was it ever possible to extend forgiveness to one who willfully regarded God himself as in league with the devil. This is spiritual death, nay, rottenness and corruption of the most putrid kind. It is no error, but a wicked, willful blasphemy of the Holy Ghost which dares to impute his works of grace and power to diabolical agency. He who is guilty of this outrageous crime has sinned himself into a condition in which spiritual feeling is dead, and repentance has become morally impossible.

Matthew 12:33. Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and its fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit.

Still he argues with the Pharisees, and as good as says, "Be consistent; accept me and my works, or reject me and my works; for by my works only can you Judge me. But do not admit the work to be a good one, and then charge me with being in league with the devil in the doing of it. If I were in league with the devil, I should do works such as the devil does, and not works which shake his kingdom." The expostulation is most powerful, because it is founded in righteousness: we judge a tree by its fruits, and a man by his actions, and there is no other truthful mode of judging.

Read the words out of their connection and they teach the great general truth that the inner and the outer life must correspond.

Matthew 12:34, 35. O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.

Our Lord accuses them of "being evil." He repeats John's words, "O generation of vipers!" They had spoken evil: how could they do otherwise when their hearts were so full of malice towards him? They had gone to the utmost extreme of malevolence in charging him with being in league with Satan, and that only showed what a treasure of evil lay within their hearts.

They threw evil forth with energy of temper, and with lavishness of falsehood, because they had such a fullness of it within. That which is in the well comes up in the bucket. The heart betrays itself through the mouth. Had they been good, their words would have been good; but such was their baseness of heart, that they could not "speak good things." Thus our Lord carried the war into their own territory, and flashed holy indignation in their faces.

Matthew 12:36, 37. But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.

They might think that they had done no great wrong when they scattered their black phrases among the people: they had only given their opinion with more or less of levity; at the worst, they had only spoken "idle words." Thus they would make light of what they had done now that the Lord had most completely crushed them. But our Lord drives them out of this retreat. He deals strictly with such gross offenders. Words are to be accounted for at the last great day. Words prove men just, or worthy of condemnation. Their very works may be judged by their words. There is a something very heart-revealing about men's language, and especially about those words which spring from deep-seated passion. We may, when we are convicted of unjust speech, shield ourselves behind the notion that our bark was worse than our bite, and that we merely said so and so, and hardly meant it to be taken so seriously; but the plea will not avail us. We must mind what we say about godly men, and especially about their Lord; for libelous words will live, and will be swift witnesses against us in the day of judgment, when we shall find that they were all recorded in the book of God.

Surely this business of charging the Lord Jesus with being in league with Satan was never likely to be heard of again while he lived! He had silenced that form of slander once for all, as far as the Pharisees were concerned.

Dear Master, help me to bridle my tongue, that I be not found guilty of idle words; and teach me when to speak, that I may keep equally clear of idle silence.

MATTHEW 12:38-42 OUR KING CHALLENGED TO GIVE A SIGN

Matthew 12:38, 39. Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee. But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas.

The Pharisees change their manner, but they are in pursuit of the same object. How hopeless had the religionists of that age become! Nothing would convince them. They manifest their hate of the Lord Jesus, by ignoring all the wonders he had wrought. What further signs could they seek than those he had already given? Pretty inquirers these! They treat all the miracles of our Lord as if they had never occurred. Well might the Lord call them "evil and adulterous", since they were so given to personal lasciviousness, and were spiritually so untrue to God. We have those among us now who are so uncandid as to treat all the achievements of evangelical doctrine as if they were nothing, and talk to us as if no result had followed the preaching of the gospel. There is need of great patience to deal wisely with such.

Matthew 12:40. For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

The great sign of our Lord's mission is his resurrection, and his preparing gospel of salvation for the heathen. His life-story is well symbolized by that of Jonah. They cast our Lord overboard, even as the sailors did the man of God. The sacrifice of Jonah calmed the sea for the mariners; our Lord's death made peace for us. Our Lord was a while in the heart of the earth as Jonah in the depth of the sea; but he rose again, and his ministry was full of the power of his resurrection. As Jonah's ministry was certified by his restoration from the sea, so is our Lord's ministry attested by his rising from the dead. The man who had come back from death and burial in the sea commanded the attention of all Nineveh, and so does the risen Savior demand and deserve the obedient faith of all to whom his message comes.

Matthew 12:41. The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.

The heathen of Nineveh were convinced by the sign of a prophet restored from burial in the sea; and moved by that convincement, they repented at his preaching. Without cavil or delay they put the whole city in mourning, and pleaded with God to turn from his anger. Jesus came with a clearer command of repentance, and a brighter promise of deliverance; but he spoke to obdurate hearts. Our Lord reminds the Pharisees of this; and as they were the most Jewish of Jews, they were touched to the quick by the fact that heathens perceived what Israel did not understand, and that Ninevites repented while Jews were hardened. All men will rise at the judgment: "The men of Nineveh shall rise." The lives of penitents will condemn those who did not repent: the Ninevites will condemn the Jews, "because they repented at the preaching of Jonas," and the Jews did not.

Those who heard Jonah and repented will be swift witnesses against those who heard Jesus and refused his testimony.

The standing witness to our Lord is his resurrection from the dead. God grant that every one of us, believing that unquestionable fact, may be so assured of his mission, that we may repent and believe the gospel.

RESURRECTION is one proof; in fact, it is THE SIGN; although, as we shall see, it is supplemented by another. The two will convince us or condemn us.

Matthew 12:42. The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here.

The second sign of our Lord's mission is HIS KINGLY WISDOM. As the fame of Solomon brought the queen of the south from the uttermost parts of the earth, so does the doctrine of our Lord command attention from the utmost isles of the sea. If Israel perceives not his glorious wisdom, Ethiopia and Seba shall hear of it, and come bowing before him. The queen of Sheba will rise again, and will "rise up" as a witness against unbelieving Jews; for she journeyed far to hear Solomon, while they would not hear the Son of God himself who came into their midst. The superlative excellence of his wisdom stands for our Lord as a sign, which can never be effectually disputed. What other teaching meets all the wants of men? Who else has revealed such grace and truth? He is

infinitely greater than Solomon, who from a moral point of view exhibited a sorrowful littleness. Who but the Son of God could have made known the Father as he has done?

MATTHEW 12:43-45 OUR KING UNVEILING THE TACTICS OF THE ARCH-ENEMY

Our Lord was mindful to deal a finishing stroke to the notion of his being aided by Satanic co-operation, by returning to his parable (verse 29), and declaring that, even if the contingency should occur of the evil spirit leaving a man of its own accord, the man would be none the more a subject of hope; for the enemy would return before long.

Matthew 12: 43. When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none.

Well is the devil named "the unclean spirit": he loves that which is foul, and makes the man in whom he dwells filthy in heart. In the incident described above, the devil has been in possession "of a man", and he "is gone out" for purposes of his own. He has quitted the man of his own accord, without conflict of any kind. This is a case which frequently occurs: the devil does in this way leave the madly immoral to become decent and orderly. The crafty spirit takes the key of the house with him, for he means to return. He has quitted occupancy, but has not given up ownership. He has gone out that he might not be turned out. Who can understand the subtlety of the old serpent?

The evil spirit is, however, uneasy when he is not ruling a human mind. He wanders seeking rest and finding none. He finds nothing to cheer him on this earth, or in heaven, or in hell; these are all dry places to him. Within the sinful heart he was at home, and found some little content; but outside in nature he finds a desert for his unclean desires. "Every prospect pleases And only man is vile!" And hence only man affords a suitable lodging for the vile spirit.

Matthew 12:44. Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished.

The foul fiend calls the man, "My house." His audacity is amazing. He did not build or buy that house, and he has no right to it. He speaks of his leaving the man as a mere coming out: "I came out." He says, as if it were an easy matter, "I will return." Evidently he considers that he has the freehold of man's nature, and can go and come at his pleasure. If Satan quits a man of his own will, he is sure to return just when it suits his purpose. Only the divine force which ejects him can secure his non-return.

Reformations which are not the work of conquering grace are usually temporary, and often lead up to a worse condition in after years.

The unclean spirit carries out his resolve: he returns, "and when he is come, he findeth it empty": no one else has taken possession, and so no one hinders his entrance into his own tenement. It is true it is swept from certain grosser sins, and garnished with some pretty moralities; but the Holy Spirit is not there, and no divine change has been wrought, and therefore the unclean spirit is as much at home there as ever he was. The parable needs no further explanation; temporary reformation is well pictured. The devil has no objection to his house being swept and garnished; for a moralist may be as truly his slave as the man of debauched habits. So long as the heart is not occupied by his great foe, and he can use the man for his own purposes, the adversary of souls will let him reform as much as he pleases.

Matthew 12:45. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation.

He takes another walk; he is so pleased with his elegant mansion that he calls upon other demons and invites them to his garnished home. The evil ones join him, and the inhabitants of the house are as eight to one of their former number. They "enter in and dwell there": they take the fullest possession and make a permanent stay. Their residence is secured beyond future likelihood of removal; and now the man is worse than at the first; for the unclean spirits are more numerous and more wicked. The sinful man becomes more proud, and more unbelieving, or he becomes more vicious and more blasphemous than at the beginning. So much

for a hopeful reformation, which indeed from the very first was hopeless, because Jesus was not there, and the Holy Spirit had no hand in it. Cunningly the unclean spirit submits to an apparent giving up of power that he may establish his dominion the more firmly. No doubt, relapses into sin are, like relapses in disease, even more dangerous than the original malady.

In Christ's day the Pharisees and others were in this case. The spirit which led the Jews to idolatry was gone, but the true God was not spiritually loved nor even known; and so the demon power held them still in possession. In the future, even in that wicked generation, in the form of hatred to Christ, and fanatical contempt of other nations, the evil spirit which had depraved Judaism, would yet display itself in a still more hideous shape; as it did from our Lord's day and onward till the destruction of Jerusalem, when the race seemed to have gone fairly mad, under a diabolical influence which made them "hateful, and hating one another." We may fear that our present age of "culture" and advancement will go onward till it reaches a similar goal. It is progressing towards infidelity, and advancing towards absurdity; while at the same time worldliness is rampant, and holiness is ridiculed.

MATTHEW 12:46-50 OUR KING AND HIS EARTHLY RELATIVES

Matthew 12:46. While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him.

The members of his family had come to take him, because they thought him beside himself. No doubt the Pharisees had so represented his ministry to his relatives that they thought they had better restrain him, lest he should procure his own destruction by his zealous preaching. Friends may be a good man's greatest hindrance. They intruded upon his holy service "while he yet talked to the people." A mark of wonder is put before this record: "Behold." How dare they act in this manner? By the request of his mother and his brethren he is called away from the pressing engagement of teaching the people, which was his urgent lifework; but the call had no power over him. What ailed Mary that she joined in this transaction? Many a nervous mother has been ready to hold back her consecrated son when his courage has defied danger. Our Lord did not allow his love to his mother to turn him aside.

Matthew 12:47. Then one said unto him, Behold thy mother and thy brethren stand without desiring to speak with thee.

An officious person reported the errand of the family: one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without. It is hard when interruptions come from our own flesh and blood; for strangers are sure to back them up. Ignorantly or willfully, the reporting person lent himself to the design of the relatives by representing that they were desiring to speak with him; though, indeed, they desired to take him. He who would not permit a disciple to neglect his duty on the plea of burying his father, how will he act now that his mother comes to hinder him? He will do the right thing. We may always find the rule of our conduct by asking the question, "What would Jesus do?"

Matthew 12:48, 49. But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren!

He does not reject the tender ties of his human nature, but he exhibits their true position as secondary to the spiritual bonds which united him to the spiritual family. Those who were related to him by the bonds of discipleship had in this the truest union with him. He pointed to "his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren!" All believers in Jesus are of the royal family, princes of the blood, brothers of the Christ.

See how he owns the affinity, and bids all know it. "He is not ashamed to call them brethren." In this instance his method of acknowledging them was singularly striking; he even set them before his earthly mother and brethren.

Lord, let us know and enjoy our nearness to thyself. Help us also to care for thee as a mother for her son, and to love thee as a man should love his own brother.

Matthew 12:50. For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.

He enlarges upon the truth. Every doer of the Father's will is thereby proved to be a true disciple, and he is to Jesus as near as a brother, as dear as a sister, as much cared for as mother. According to our condition and capacity, let us act towards our Lord the part of brother in help, of sister in sympathy, of mother in tender love; for all these relationships act in both ways, and involve giving as well as receiving. What a blessed "whosoever" is this! It is not for ministers only, or for persons set apart to special service; but all who do the Father's will in any position of life are encompassed in the family circle of the Lord Christ.

Our Lord Jesus had a little while before cut himself adrift from the bands of formality by routing the scribes and Pharisees, and now the knife goes deeper, and all that is of the flesh at its very best is divided from that which is of the spirit. Henceforth it is clear that after the flesh he knows no man any more; neither can we hope to know him by birth-right membership, or anything else that is of blood, or birth, or of the will of the flesh. The inner life which is akin to God, and shows itself in holiness, is that which gives us union with our Lord. Oh, to feel its influence more and more!