

Putting Roadblocks in Our Own Path to Life

Thomas Robinson, *Following or Rejecting Jesus*, 7, January 12, 2014

Matthew 12:33-50

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 things, when you are bad?** 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.”

³⁸ Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, “Teacher, **we want 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.**

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.”

⁴⁶ While he was still speaking to the people, behold, **his mother and his brothers** stood outside, asking to speak to him. ⁴⁷

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.”

Matthew 12:23-24

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.” ...

³² (Jesus said) “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.”

Matthew 12:5-6

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.**”

Isaiah 59:5-8

⁵ They hatch adders’ eggs; ...

he who eats their eggs dies,
and from one that is crushed a viper is hatched.

⁶ ... Their works are works of iniquity,

and deeds of violence are in their hands.

⁷ Their feet run to evil,
and they are swift to shed innocent blood.

⁸ The way of peace they do not know....

Talking about Good from a Bad Heart

We go back with Matthew into a period of intense controversy in Jesus' ministry: challenges by religious teachers. Breaking Sabbath. Right to interpret Torah. Authority as Messiah. Doing God's will (Sabbath healing). Jesus as danger. Casting out demons by Beelzebub. Blasphemy. Jesus here begins with his frustration with the Pharisees. (Think Saul of Tarsus.) They think of themselves as genuinely devoted to God. Concern for his Law. Purity. Zeal. But they can't tell the difference between the Holy Spirit's work and Beelzebub. It shouldn't be that way. Good should produce good; bad, bad. They look like good eggs, but are poisonous vipers. They seem to talk God's way, but don't see God's new work. Not hopeless, like Peter/Satan (16:23). They endanger themselves/others in judgment – a throwaway word – they trap themselves. Jesus uses various images of judgment to emphasize what's at stake: sheep/goats; every word; throw away right eye/hand; Men of Nineveh; say 'Fool!' – gehenna of fire (5:22, 29; 25:41).

Prove Yourself to Us. We don't want to take chances.

The scribes and Pharisees show sweet reason. All we want is a sign – something unmistakable. Jesus says, it's not just you; it's the mark of a generation. A common human trait. (v.39, 45). But, of course, a sign that others saw as "son of David," to them meant Beelzebub. Signs are a test for the one who sees them. What do I see? Ancient problem: Isaiah's mission. People hear but don't hear. See but don't see. When I look at the world what do I see? Adulterous – We want to dance with Yahweh and Baal (Elijah). We want both God and Mammon. We live in practically the ultimate adulterous generation in this sense. We hedge our bets on everything. One God? Intolerant, imperialistic! Jesus? Exclusivity. Everything is God. I'm God. The one great sign – Jonah, Resurrection. The sign of life, hope, transformation. For everyone, even us Pharisees. But can we see it? Something so new. Greater than Jonah, than Solomon.

Empty People, Open to Anything

Jesus goes back to the unclean spirit – the one (typical) that Jesus just cast out. – to show how we endanger ourselves. It's not enough to get rid of a demon. Humans can't/don't remain empty. G. K. Chesterton: *'When people stop believing in God, it's not that they believe in nothing, it's that they believe in anything.'* When people lose sight of God's astonishing work in Jesus, any sort of variation/distortion is possible. There is one point of balance. Lots of possibilities were open to that generation – philosophies, sects, – but "the way of peace they did not know." Jesus says their ultimate situation will be like seven demons returning. It is the challenge of each generation. What God has done seems wild and unbelievable, but it is the only thing that brings complete sanity, wholeness, peace, healing, transformation, and hope. Anything seems more swept and clean than incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection. But nothing else deals with the complex corruption and beauty of human life. Nothing else works.

Kith and Kin of the Messiah

In the midst of all this, Jesus' family approaches. Family meant identity, belonging. They were children of Abraham. Messiah was Son of David. The Messiah's family must be important. This story says nothing about Jesus' family except they are "standing outside." It is not negative about Mary and Jesus' brothers and sisters, but positive about disciples. Jesus points to those around him. Simplicity of family. No blood relation. No special education, no Pharisaic training. No distinct jargon. Just listening, learning, following. Anyone can enter the circle: Anyone who seeks the will of my father is "my mother, my brother, my sister." Don't be empty. "Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness." Everything else follows.