

12:1 *Hungered*- The very poor were allowed to do this by the Law (Lev. 19:9; Dt. 23:24,25), and so we see in this a picture of the deep poverty of the Lord's followers; He later parallels the urgent hunger of David's men at the time of 1 Sam. 21 with that of His followers. It would seem that He Himself did not make use of the concession, because the criticism was focused upon His disciples rather than Himself. W.D. Davies lists evidence that Judaism forbade fasting on the Sabbath (Jubilees 50:12) (1). In this case, the record is showing how the legalism of the time would've condemned the disciples- and the poor generally- either way: for fasting on the Sabbath, or for 'threshing' on the Sabbath to get food so as not to fast. The Lord therefore takes the whole argument to a level far above such petty legalism.

*Began*- The only point in mentioning this would presumably be because the Pharisees came and stopped them. This shows how closely the Lord and His men were under the critical eyes of others, even from a distance.

12:2 *Not lawful*- A constant concern with the Pharisees (Mt. 19:3; 22:17; 27:6; Jn. 5:10; 18:31). The Lord's attitude here was to show that the Old Testament itself envisaged situations where true spirituality was above law. The parable of Mt. 20:15 brings the point home- the generous employer justified his pouring out of grace, giving the weak and lazy the same penny a day as the hard workers, on the basis that 'It is lawful for me to do what I wish'.

12:3 *Have you not read*- Of course they had, many times. But the Lord here and several times elsewhere challenges them (and us) as to whether we have really read what we have. The Lord could have legitimately answered them: 'It is lawful to pick corn whilst passing through a field, the Law allows for this if one is poor, and my followers are indeed poor. There is nothing in the Law which stipulates this permission doesn't operate on the Sabbath'. But as always, the Lord was prepared to meet people where they were, and to take them to a higher level. He seeks to teach by general principle that the extent of His Lordship meant that He and His men were free to do as they pleased on this kind of matter. He reasoned that 'OK, let's assume you're right, but David and *his* men broke the law because they were about God's business, this over-rode the need for technical obedience'. The Lord Jesus wasn't constantly correcting specific errors of interpretation. He dealt in principles much larger than this, in order to make a more essential, practical, useful point.

*They that were with him*- The Lord's reasoning depends upon drawing a parallel between Himself and David, and David's warriors and the disciples. Again, He is encouraging them to see themselves as no less than the warriors of David who later became the governors of Israel.

Aaron's sons were the ones who were intended to eat the showbread (Lev. 24:5-9)- and again the Lord is inviting His secular disciples to see themselves as a new priesthood.

12:4 *Entered into*- For non-Levites to enter the Sanctuary was also not 'lawful', quite apart from eating the bread which only the priests could lawfully eat. This prepares the way for the Lord's later parable about God urging unclean street people to 'enter [His] house' because Israel had rejected the invitation (the same words are used- Lk. 14:23). The psychological magnitude of the Lord's new system of thinking is hard to appreciate. Non-Levites could now enter it- and even the worst of the Gentiles. But the magnitude of the new thinking in Christ for anyone, not least secular people of the 21st Century, is no less.

*The showbread*- The Lord defended the non-observant Judaism of the twelve as being due to their joy that He, the bridegroom, was with them (Lk. 5:33,34). When they 'ground corn' on the Sabbath, the Lord defended them to their critics by saying that they were like David's men eating the showbread. Those guys were just walking through a cornfield rubbing ears together as their manner was, as they had done on many a Sabbath day, but not realizing that this time there was some Scribe out with his binocular vision scrutinizing them. They surely weren't doing it because their minds were on the incident of David's men eating the showbread. The Lord had asked them to obey the Scribes, who sat in Moses' seat, over this kind of trivia. But He doesn't rebuke them. Rather, He defends them to others, imputing far more spiritual perception to them than they had (Lk. 6:1-4).

12:5 *Have you not read*- We need to reflect upon the implications of the fact that the vast majority of the early Christians were illiterate. Literacy levels in first century Palestine were only 10% at the highest estimate. Some estimate that the literacy level in the Roman empire was a maximum of 10%, and literacy levels in Palestine were at most 3%. Most of the literate people in Palestine would have been either the wealthy or the Jewish scribes. And yet it was to the poor that the Gospel was preached, and even in Corinth there were not many educated or "mighty" in this world within the ecclesia. Notice how the Lord said to the Pharisees: "Have you not *read*?" (Mk. 2:25; Mt. 12:5; 19:4), whilst He says to those who responded to Him: "You have *heard*" (Mt. 5:21,27,33). His followers were largely the illiterate. As the ecclesial world developed, Paul wrote inspired letters to the ecclesias. Those letters would have been *read* to the brethren and sisters. Hence the great importance of 'teachers' in the early churches, those who could faithfully read and transmit to others what had been written.

*The priests-* The rabbis taught that “Temple service takes precedence over the Sabbath” (2). Thinking through the logic of the Lord’s argument, He clearly has the view that His disciples are about the work of the temple, walking through that cornfield. Otherwise His appeal to the rabbinic dictum had no sense. Again, He is encouraging His followers to see themselves as far more than secular, not very spiritual people who are personally attracted to the teachings of Jesus and are awed by His miracles. He’s saying that actually they are as priests, professionally committed to serving God actively.

*Profane-* The Lord (Mt. 12:5) said that the priests "profaned" or ‘desecrated’ the Sabbath; He didn't say that because they kept the spirit of it, that was O.K. By using a word as extreme as "profaned" He seems to be even emphasizing the point of paradox within God’s self-revelation.

Having accepted the Bible as the source of authority, we find that the Bible does not categorically list what behaviour is acceptable and what is unacceptable. Even within the Law of Moses, to obey some commands meant breaking others. And it is a common dilemma of sincere believers that they find themselves having to break one principle to keep another. The Bible is written in such a way as to give clear instruction to those who love and respect it, and yet to confuse those who do not fundamentally accept it into thinking that their faulty understanding is in fact the will of God. This is why it is true, on a surface level, that you can prove what you like from the Bible. Adolf Hitler, Jim Jones, David Koresh *et al* all managed to 'prove' the most bizarre things from the Bible- and persuade others to genuinely think that to do evil was in fact doing righteousness. So the fact that someone thinks that they are correctly interpreting the Bible does not thereby justify them, however sincere their conscience may be. And it does not mean that the church must therefore accept them, just because their conscience is clear and they think the Bible justifies their behaviour. The opposite of love isn't so much hatred, as indifference. To be indifferent to the real welfare of our fellows in this world, and of *all* our own brethren, is perhaps our most common sin. The Lord taught us that we should have a sense of urgency in our response to others. The Lord showed by His example that it is better to meet the hunger of human need than to keep the letter of Sabbath law (Mk. 2:25,26). *His* urgency, *God's* urgency, *our* consequent urgency... all means that when even Divine principles appear to come into conflict, we are to be influenced above all by the urgency of others' need.

12:6 *This place-* Sacred space was a big idea within Judaism. The Lord is directly challenging it by stating that He as a person was more holy and significant than the temple. The way He ate with sinners and touched the ritually unclean likewise reflect a redefinition of the holy. The implication could be that the Lord was standing at the edge of a cornfield (He was not within the synagogue- :9)- and He declared everywhere touched by Him to be holy.

12:7 *Known what this means*- This continues the challenge of :3- "Have you never read?". They *had* read, but without understanding. They had read without perceiving meaning- and it led them to "condemn the guiltless". Without unduly exalting intellectualism for its own sake, this is a sobering thought- that the crucifixion of God's Son was the result of a chronic lack of understanding of God's word. To pay lip service to Biblicism is not enough; the meaning in the words, the whole issue of interpretation, is crucially important; getting it wrong can lead to crucifying the Son of God afresh. The Greek *esti* translated 'means' is basically the verb 'to be'- if they had known what the Scripture 'is' they would've have condemned the guiltless. The Bible 'is' its true interpretation, and this idea comes to its ultimate term in the declaration of Jesus as being 'the word'.

*I will have mercy*- Hos. 6:6 says that Yahweh "desires mercy". These two Hebrew words sound similar to each other- mercy / grace is so identified with God's passion and desire. The same Hebrew words are to be found in the statements that He desires / delights in grace / mercy (Jer. 9:24; Mic. 7:18). If *He* delights in forgiveness and grace, then we should also; His passion should be ours. This of itself outlaws the critical eyes of the Pharisees, noticing the disciples' infringement of a law and feeling the need to 'take up the matter' with them. And it will be the same with us. The human tendency to observe others with eyes of criticism and sensitivity to their weaknesses will be displaced if we simply delight in mercy. The Hosea passage goes on to condemn the Jewish religious leadership in language which the Lord clearly used in constructing the parable of the good Samaritan: "As troops of robbers wait for a man, so the company of priests murder in the way by consent" (Hos. 6:8). But there's a subtle twist- the priest in the Lord's story passed by on the other side and simply did nothing. That inaction is paralleled with being as bad as the thieves themselves. The priest was returning from having offered sacrifice, but he didn't show mercy- and God wants mercy and not sacrifice. Note that the passage in Hos. 6:6 is perhaps purposefully ambiguous. It could mean 'I want to see you showing mercy, and not [so much offering] sacrifice'; or it could mean 'I myself want / love / delight in [showing] mercy rather than [receiving] sacrifice'. The ambiguity is because God's will / love / delight should be ours. And we can read the quotation of that passage here in Mt. 12:7 with the same double meaning. His passion for grace must be ours, and this precludes looking critically at others, eager to perceive their breaches of our perceptions of God's law.

*Condemned the guiltless*- Who exactly did the Lord have in mind? He has just used the same word when stating that the priests work on the Sabbath and are "blameless". By condemning the disciples, the Pharisees were thus condemning the priests too. This argument of course supposes that the Lord's secular, spiritually ragtag followers were in fact priests- the priests of the new system He was bringing in. The ultimately guiltless was of course the Lord Himself, and He foresaw their final condemnation of Him, perceiving that in essence it had already happened. For whoever condemns His followers condemns Him, so deeply is He associated with them. But how

would the Pharisees have avoided condemning the guiltless disciples by appreciating that God wants mercy and not sacrifice? I suggest that the Lord is again meeting them on their own level: 'You consider the disciples are guilty. OK, that's not what the Law says, but OK, let's assume they are. But if you simply *loved* showing mercy as God does, then you would not have condemned them anyway. You would've overlooked the incident'.

12:8 *The Son of man is Lord*- Here as elsewhere we see the juxtaposition of the Lord's humanity and His Lordship. His exaltation is precisely because He was human; He has authority to judge us because He was Son of man (Jn. 5:27). The Lordship of Jesus was predicated upon His obedience to death and exaltation (Acts 2:36), and yet Jesus was calmly confident that this would be achieved by Him; to the point that He could reason that He already was "Lord" and thereby able to abrogate the Sabbath and act as the ultimate temple.

*Of the Sabbath*- The "of" is supplied as guesswork by the translators; it could equally be left unsupplied, giving the sense of "the Lord the Sabbath"; or, "Lord *on* the Sabbath". Mark adds that the Lord went on to teach that God's law was made for man, rather than man being built in such a way as to easily fit in with God's word (Mk. 2:27).

12:9 Luke's record adds that this was on another Sabbath- at least the next week.

*Went into*- The point is that the Lord was *outside* the synagogue when He declared that the "place" where He was then standing, in or near a cornfield, was holy ground; see on :6.

12:10 *Behold*- I have suggested that this word is best understood by likening Matthew to a cameraman shooting a movie, who now zooms in on an encounter.

*His hand*-His right hand, according to Luke. His own strength and ability to act was withered.

*Accuse*- A legal term. They wanted to get Jesus in court over this issue. But there's no evidence they actually did, and there was no recorded mention of Sabbath breaking in His final trial- so well and profoundly did He answer them.

12:11 *One sheep*- A poor man, who had only one sheep- as in the parable Nathan told David. The Lord saw the man with the withered hand as His sheep- His only sheep. Here we have an

insight into an old problem: 'Seeing we are many and Jesus is one, how can it be that He feels so uniquely towards me, when He has so many other people to think about and relate to?'. It is possible for God and His Son to have emotional and psychological capabilities which we do not have. The Lord seems to be teaching here that He identifies with the poor, who has only *one* sheep; but He feels to each of us as if we are all that He has. Likewise in the parable of the woman who lost one of her dowry coins; they were all she had. We are all Jesus has. He has no other group on another planet in another dimension- we here on earth, we with all our dysfunction and poor response to His love, are all He has. And further- *you* are all He has. The man had been sick for some time, but the Lord saw his situation as if it had only just happened, that Sabbath day, and felt an urgency to respond. The *urgency* is a key issue- for the issue wasn't healing, it was why Jesus couldn't wait a few hours until the end of the Sabbath to heal. The Mishnah taught that the Sabbath could be broken if life was in immediate danger (m. Yoma 8.6). The Pharisees obviously reasoned that this wasn't the case- a paralyzed hand could wait a few hours for healing. But Jesus was perhaps making the point that to Him, human need is urgent and cannot wait. We must remember His sense of urgency when we struggle with His apparent slowness to respond. The spirit of urgency comes through the Gospel records and also the Acts.

*Fall into a pit-* The Law specifically foresaw such a situation, pronouncing judgment against the person responsible for leaving a pit open so that animals might fall into it (Ex. 21:33,34). The Lord's point was that there was not a moment to lose once this happened- there was an urgency to save the animal, and that urgency was far more important than seeking to condemn the person who had breached the law. And this was how the Lord saw that man with a "withered hand"; the need was the call, and to Him there was an urgency about the situation that was far more important than any concern about legalistic obedience to laws- be they real or imagined.

*Take hold-* This apparently unnecessary detail is included because the same word is used about the Lord's touching or grasping of people before He healed them (Mt. 9:25; Mk. 1:31; 5:41; 9:27). As they would urgently lay hold upon a lost sheep and lift it out of a pit, so the Lord laid hold upon people and healed them. Reflect on how the Lord 'took hold' of people before healing them. This feature of the miracles demonstrated His desire to fully take hold of our human experiences, thereby identifying Himself with us- and on that basis, healing us. The same idea, although a different word, is to be found in the language of Heb. 2:16, speaking of the Lord Jesus taking hold upon humanity by having our nature.

*Lift it out-* The same word is used for people 'rising up' after being healed by the Lord (Mt. 8:15; 9:5,6,25; 10:8; 11:5). Jewish people would've thought of the rescue of Joseph and Jeremiah from pits. The healing of this man, like so many of the healing miracles, had a spiritual intention-

it was in order to save him from the pit of death. We saw on 11:20 that the purpose of the miracles was to lead people to repentance, not simply to alleviate human need for the sake of it.

12:12 *Better than a sheep*- The Lord favourably compares men to animals (to birds, Mt. 6:26; sparrows, Mt. 10:31; and again in Lk. 12:7,24). Whilst in the manner of our death we are as "the beasts of the field", the Lord seems to be at pains to ensure we realize the value and meaning of the human person, made as we are in God's image. If we treat people as animals, we have failed to perceive something of God which is uniquely in humanity.

*Therefore*- Again, the Lord doesn't base His argument around the obvious misunderstanding of the Law which the Pharisees had. He avoids a tit-for-tat expositional battle over semantics by introducing higher principles- the sheer value and need of the human person transcends any issue of legalistic obedience to any law, be it God's laws or the interpretation of them. This is a principle which legalistic churches need to bear in mind to this day in their decision making.

*To do well*- Mark records that He developed this point- if He had *not* performed the miracle, He would have been actively committing "evil", even 'killing'. When the Lord taught that it was right to break the Sabbath because they were in the business of saving life (Mk. 3:4), His words were purposefully alluding to how the Maccabees had pronounced that it was acceptable for Jewish soldiers to break the Sabbath in time of war, in order to save lives through their fighting (1 Macc. 2:32). He intended His people to live as active soldiers on duty, at war in order to save the lives of God's people. Indeed, so frequently, the whole language of the future judgment is applied to us right here and now. We are living out our judgment now; we are standing as it were before the final judgment seat, and receiving our judgment for how we act, speak and feel and are. Thus if He had omitted to heal the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath, this would have been 'doing evil' and even 'killing' (Mk. 3:4). That's how seriously He took omitting to do good when it's in our power to do it. He had a choice of saving life or destroying life, were He to prefer to keep the Sabbath laws above the need for preserving life. Clearly He saw failing to act to save life as tantamount to destroying life. We must give our Lord's words their due weight here in our decision making. To not act to save life, to excuse ourselves for whatever reason, is effectively destroying life, or, as Mark's record puts it, "to kill" (Mk. 3:4; Lk. 6:9). We can't therefore be passive in this matter. The context of the Lord's statement was in response to questions about whether something was "lawful" or not; it was the age old question, 'Is it a sin to do X, Y or Z?'. His answer was as ever in terms of a principle- that our guiding principle must be the saving and healing and preservation of human life. The attitude of the Pharisees was that the Lord was infringing a letter of the law and therefore was guilty of death. They murdered Him on the Sabbath days; and thus they chose to destroy life rather than save it. The word for "to kill" in Mk. 3:4 is so often used in the Gospels about the killing of Jesus. They failed to take His exhortation. The crucifixion of God's Son was thus a result of legalism; it was because of His attitude to the man with the withered hand that the Pharisees first plotted to kill Jesus (Lk. 6:11).

Whatever our individual conscience, let us not "be filled with madness" as the Pharisees were at the fact the Lord approached human behaviour in terms of principles, rather than reducing everything to a common right / wrong scenario. The principle is clearly the saving and preservation and enriching of others' lives. Surely we should each allow each other to articulate this fundamental issue as we each have occasion to do so.

12:13 *Stretch forth your hand*- Matthew uses the same word to describe how the Lord Himself stretched forth *His* hand in order to heal, save and welcome (Mt. 8:3; 12:49; 14:31). Again we are encouraged to perceive a sense of mutuality between the Lord and His people.

*Like the other*- This detail is recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke. It is another touch of the eye witness- the man would've held out both his hands and everyone would've looked from the one to the other, observing they now looked so similar.

12:14 *Then*- Here we see the common human feature of doing evil in response to the experience of grace. Even amongst believers, and even at judgment day, there is the possibility of the eye becoming evil because of His goodness and grace to others (Mt. 20:15). We see the principle in both secular and church life. Grace shown to others can elicit the worst evil from religious people. We shouldn't be surprised at this phenomenon; but it is the very surprise at encountering it which causes so many to become disillusioned with the church and ultimately with the Lord.

*Went out*- Again, an emphasis on physical movement. We imagine Matthew's camera covering their departure from the synagogue.

*A council*- S.w. "a consultation". Nothing formal is necessarily implied by the word. Perhaps we are to imagine them gathering in a tight circle somewhere outside the synagogue.

12:15 *But when*- Were there sympathizers for Jesus within the Pharisees who told Him this? Or is this another case of Him perceiving the minds of men?

*Withdrew*- Several times we read of the Lord withdrawing from the public, or at least trying to (Mt. 4:12; 14:13; 15:21; Mk. 3:7; Jn. 6:15). We get the impression that He made public appearances, did some healing and teaching, and then 'withdrew'. The Gospel records focus much on the last week and months of His ministry. The first three years has relatively little recorded- but there is a lot of information about some very long, action packed days. We can assume too easily that these recorded days were typical. But perhaps they were not. There are probably no more than 20 days' events recorded- out of the three and a half years of the Lord's ministry. One possibility is that the rest of the time, or much of it, He spent simply teaching the disciples. If the Lord maintained the same tempo and intensity of His recorded activity throughout the three and a half years, it surely would've been almost impossible to have avoided



His being propelled to political power by the masses. This suggestion of limited public activity makes better sense of the note we made on Mt. 11:20, that the majority of His miracles were performed in three small villages in Galilee. That also must provide some context to the comment here that He healed 'all' the multitudes on this occasion; He healed 'all' amongst the crowds who were in need of healing, not every member of the crowd.

Mark adds that the Lord withdrew grieving for their hard hearts. The way the Lord didn't just ignore the Jewish leaders, as we might ignore trouble makers at a public meeting or correspondence course students who ask endless questions... this is really quite something. He grieved for the hardness of their hearts (Mk. 3:5), and finally broke down and wept over Jerusalem, in an agony of soul that they would not respond. The apparently foolish catch questions of Mk. 3:21-29 are answered in some depth by the Lord, and He concludes with pointing out that they are putting themselves "*in danger* of eternal damnation" (although, notice, not yet condemned). One senses the urgency with which He put it to them. He was angry [i.e. frustrated?], "being grieved for the blindness of their hearts" (Mk. 3:5). Are we just indifferent or evenly smugly happy that men are so blind...? Or do we grieve about it to the point of angry frustration? Remember how Moses and Paul would fain have given their eternal life for the conversion of Israel, this is how they felt for them.

12:16 *Not make Him known*- It was predicted of the Lord's preaching that He would not "strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice [raised up in this way] in the streets". And for this reason He asked His converts not to "make him known" in this way; He wanted them to witness *as He witnessed* (Mt. 12:16,19). This is quite something, the more we reflect upon it. He rebuked the self-righteous, restored peoples' dignity, alleviated their poverty and sicknesses to give them a foretaste of the future blessings of His Kingdom on earth, opposed legalistic and corrupt religious practices, and ultimately gave His life to show that even His enemies were encompassed in His love. This is the pattern for us, especially in our seeking to do these things in the lives of those who respond to the Gospel.

But the same words ("*make Him known*") are used about how later, He was made known by the church (Acts 4:16; 1 Jn. 3:10). It could well be that as so often with Semitic languages, we must read in an ellipsis- 'Not make Him known [immediately, right then, at that time]'. The implication could be that they were indeed to make Him known- but later. The great commission, to take the knowledge of Christ to all men everywhere, could then be comfortably read in this context; the commission signalled the end of the relative silence which the Lord called for. In line with our comments on how and why the Lord withdrew Himself from the crowds in the preceding verse (:15), it would seem that the Lord was constantly concerned on a

practical level that His ministry would be badly impaired if the masses of Palestine rose up out of His control and made Him King. He wanted above all to teach and personally model the Kingdom, and being at the centre of a political uprising thrusting Him forward would not enable that. *Phaneros*, "known", is only elsewhere used in Matthew in the Lord's teaching about what would happen "openly" (s.w.) at the establishment of the Kingdom at the last day (Mt. 6:4,6,18). The Lord didn't want them trying to establish the Kingdom there and then in their own strength, and especially whilst so seriously misunderstanding the nature and essence of the Kingdom- for they still thought it was all about military victory against Rome. So it could be that the idea of 'to make known' may mean far more than 'Don't tell anyone'; it was psychologically impossible to expect that multitudes of people who had seen healings would literally not breathe a word to anyone else. It was obvious that healings had been done- people came home healed. To 'not make known' doesn't have to mean 'Don't tell a word of this to anyone', indeed the Lord's parables and other teachings suggest that such telling of others is an inevitable part of response to Him. I suggest it means more of the flavour of 'Don't declare Me publically as King'.

12:17 *That it might be fulfilled*- This is often stated as the reason why the Lord did and said things. He was consciously seeking to be 'the word made flesh' and consciously tried to fulfil the Old Testament prophecies. Despite strong resistance to this idea by some expositors, Harry Whittaker particularly, it seems to me the most natural understanding of the phrase and the force of the word "That...".

*Spoken... saying*- The implication could be that Isaiah publically spoke these words, directing Israel's attention to a "servant" figure of his own time, who all the same failed to be Messianic as intended, meaning that the prophecy had its fulfilment reapplied in Jesus. Or perhaps it was because the Lord was addressing people who had largely only *heard* Isaiah being read. Literacy was only a few percent in first century Palestine, and nobody had the Old Testament scrolls at home. Therefore the Lord speaks in terms of Isaiah *speaking* and *saying*, rather than writing and us reading.

12:18 *Behold My servant*- The focus was to be upon beholding Jesus personally, and not listening to endless tales of miracles, inevitably exaggerated as they were passed around. If this is the reason for the quotation, then the stress would be upon *beholding* Him, appreciating Him, rather than seeking to get temporal benefit from His healing miracles.

*Show justice*- The Lord didn't want the crowds getting so maxed out on His miracles and other physicalities that they paid no attention to His message; for the purpose of His being amongst men was primarily to "show justice". And that justice was to be shown to *Gentiles*- they were to be shown justice and salvation, not slain so that a Kingdom of God open to Jews only could be established upon Gentile corpses. This was the kind of false view of the Kingdom which the

Lord didn't hold and didn't want given credibility by associating Himself and His miracles with it. But *krisis*, translated "justice", can also mean judgment in the sense of future judgment to come. Yet these same Gentiles who were to be shown (according to that reading) judgment to come, were to be given the opportunity to trust in the Messiah's Name (:21). And justice [s.w.] was to be "cast out" in victory- i.e. victory against judgment. In Christ, mercy was to triumph against judgment, rejoicing against it as if after a bitter contest which was won by mercy (James 2:13). But to appreciate that good news, the Gentiles firstly had to realize what "judgment" really was. These were the things the Lord wanted to teach, but to get the points over, He needed the crowds to not be so hyped up by His miracles and to stop all talk of establishing a political Kingdom at that time.

The Lord's showing judgment to the Gentiles and not publicly striving or crying in his preaching (Mt. 12:18-21) primarily fulfilled the Kingdom prophecy of Is. 42:1-3. Note how His gentle, low pressure attitude to preaching will be the same in the Kingdom as it was in the first century. In the same way Is. 54:13 concerning the future preaching of the Gospel in the Kingdom is quoted about Christ in Jn. 6:45.

*To the Gentiles-* As in :21, the purpose of the healing was to show something to the Gentiles. But there were no Gentiles mentioned as being in the audience. Are we to infer that there were some present? More likely, as this whole incident occurred in a Jewish synagogue (:9), the Lord's point was that the unbelieving amongst God's people are no better than Gentiles. The Lord's miracles showed forth God's judgment principles; in them He showed judgment to the Gentiles, and sent forth God's judgments (Mt. 12:18-20 quotes Is. 42:1-3 concerning how the Lord will do this at the events of the second coming).

12:19 Is. 42:1,2 concerning Christ's witness to the *Gentiles* is quoted in Mt. 12:19 regarding His witness to an apostate Israel. Those among God's people who break their covenant with Him, He sees as the world. Israel were to be made like "the top of a rock" just as Gentile Tyre would be (Ez. 24:7; 26:4). "Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers", the Lord said to Israel (Mt. 23:32)- yet He was alluding to how the Gentile Amorites filled up the cup of God's judgments and then had to drink it. Pharaoh's heart was hardened to bring about God's glory, but Paul uses the very same language, in the same context, to describe what was happening to an apostate, Egypt-like Israel (Rom. 9:17). Korah and his company were swallowed by the earth, using the very language which Moses so recently had applied to how the Egyptians were swallowed by the earth at the Red Sea (Ex. 15:12).

*Not strive-* This is quoted from the servant song of Is. 42, and the Lord is applying it to all those who follow Him. If *He* is not to strive or clamour in the streets, then neither are those who follow Him to do so. For all that is true of Him is true of them. Paul makes the same point in stating that "the servant of the Lord must not strive" (2 Tim. 2:24). The "servant" is ultimately the Messianic servant of Isaiah's servant songs, but the point is that all that is true of that Servant is true of all those in Him.

*The streets-* The Lord didn't shout out in the streets who He was. He wished His followers to follow His example in *showing* the message to the world just as He did- in who He was (Mt. 12:18). Christ's instruction to His recent converts not to spread the Gospel in an unseemly way, because it was written about *Him personally that* "he shall not strive nor cry; neither shall any man hear *His* voice in the streets". In other words, the true preacher of Christ is solidly identified with Him by the very act of preaching. Truly "we are ambassadors for Christ" (2 Cor. 5:20) in our witnessing. His voice is our voice.

12:20 *Reed... flax-* The Hebrew words used in Is. 42:3 suggest this is a reference to the candlestick; the words respectively mean a shaft / stem, and a wick.

*Until-* The Lord's patience with the useless candlestick of Israel and the weakness of the ecclesia will be "until" His final victory over judgment. That happened in one sense on the cross, but in another sense it will only happen when death is swallowed up in victory at the day of judgment. Until then, both He and us are to patiently bear with the damaged and dysfunctional ecclesial candlestick. But in that day, those elements of the candlestick which refuse to give light to the house will be "broken", the Greek meaning 'broken in pieces'- the language of condemnation (Mt. 21:44).

*Send forth judgment-* Gk. to cast out, thrust out. See on 12:19 *show justice*. Judgment is cast out *eis*, "in", victory.

*Bruised reed... smoking flax-* Little strength, little light (if the reference is to the reed which took oil to the lamps of the candlestick), little heat- but all the same, the Lord seeks to fan it into life rather than walk away in disappointment; and by doing so, sets a challenging example to many of us, whose most frequent complaint is the weak state of the brotherhood's members. If the reference is to a damaged and smoky candlestick, this becomes the more poignant- for the candlestick was a clear symbol of Israel and then of the ecclesias (Rev. 1:12,13,20; 2:1).

*Not quench-* When judgment is finally cast out by mercy at the last day, then the dysfunctional

candlestick will be quenched or destroyed in condemnation. Note how the metaphor of quenching a fire is used here for condemnation; but in another metaphor, condemnation is spoken of as the very opposite- unquenchable fire. This is sure proof that we are not to read 'unquenchable fire' as literal.

12:21 *The Gentiles*- Mark's record adds what Matthew strangely omits- that the great crowds whom He charged to not "make Him known" included Gentiles (Mk. 3:6-8). This makes sense of why the Lord healed "all" in the crowd (:15)- the sense is not that He healed every person in the crowd, as not all of them were in need of healing; perhaps rather the stress on "all" is to show that the sick Gentiles who were present were *also* healed. Note that "In His Name shall the Gentiles trust" is a quotation from the LXX of Is. 42:4 and not the Masoretic Text, which reads "The isles shall wait for His law". The ready acceptance of the LXX by the inspired NT writers, even preferring it over the Hebrew, has many implications. One of them is that the genealogies as found in the LXX do not support the idea of Adam being 4000 years before Christ, which is essential to those who believe that the six day / thousand year periods ended in 2000 AD and the Millennium must now be established.

12:22 *Brought*- The Greek is used about bring an offering. We recall how the conversion of individuals is spoken as offering them as a sacrifice in Rom. 15:16. Bringing people to the Lord is offering them to Him because they are to present themselves, or be presented, as living sacrifices in His service (Rom. 12:1). There may therefore be a connection with the use later in this verse of *thereapeuo* for "healed", as this word is also translated "worship" in the sense of Divine worship. The Lord had just cured large numbers of people, but then withdrew from them. Now they find Him again and bring just one sick person for healing. The people were "amazed" (:23) at this one healing- whereas the Lord had healed many sick people in :15. We are left with the impression of how deeply "amazed" the crowds must have been, if there was so much amazement at just one cure, there must have been super amazement at the mass healings.

*Possessed with a demon*- The Greek strictly means to be exercised or controlled by a demon. This is the language used at the time for explaining medical situations which today we would diagnose differently. Blindness and deafness are explicable in medical terms. The verse states that the Lord 'healed' the man and therefore, because of that healing, the blindness and deafness left him. The language of healing of persons is not what we would expect if the Lord instead engaged in battle with demonic entities in Heaven or at least, outside of the man.

12:23 *Amazed*- See on 12:22 *brought*. This is a strong word, meaning utterly astonished, and even used about madness (Mk. 3:21; 2 Cor. 5:13).

*Son of David*- The people made a direct connection between the ability to do miracles and being

Messiah. Yet earlier in this commentary I have pointed out that generally the Lord worked with an economy of miracle, and the number of miracles He did appear to have decreased as His ministry progressed. His understanding of Isaiah 42:1-3 just quoted was that Messiah should be 'beheld', be understood and appreciated on a spiritual level, rather than be a miracle worker whipping up mass support because of that. And yet He appreciated the strong connection in peoples' minds between Messiahship and miracles, and He therefore conceded to this by doing miracles.

12:24 *When-* Their comment appears to have been made in very hot blood, for it was logically contradictory to claim that someone who cast out demons must therefore be in league with the prince of the demons; because their own sons (either literally or in the sense of their disciples) claimed to cast out demons (:27). And if Jesus was actually on the side of the prince of demons, why then was he as it were fighting for the other side by casting out demons. Such gaping error in logic was exactly what the Pharisees were constantly careful to avoid; but their intense jealousy of the Lord led them to make this logical error. Again we note that the Lord's style was not so much to directly state the errors of his opponents, but to work on the assumption that their beliefs were correct- and to then follow those beliefs to their logical conclusions, thus showing how those positions contradicted themselves to the point they could not be true. This is one explanation for the use of the language of demons in the Gospels, even though demons don't in fact exist.

*By Beelzebub-* By the instrumentality of Beelzebub. They were driven to assume that the Lord was in league with some higher power in order to perform His miracles. If it wasn't the Holy Spirit of God- it had to be by some other power, and the only option in their theology was some form of the Satan myth. Their logical desperation is a reflection of the undeniable nature of the Lord's miracles (as in Acts 4:16). Any who claim to be able to do miracles through the Holy Spirit should likewise be producing healings which even their most sceptical opponents cannot deny are miracles; but that feature is not seen in many claims of healings today. When accused of being in league with 'satan', the Lord didn't read them a charge of blasphemy. He reasoned instead that a thief cannot bind a strong man; and likewise He couldn't bind 'satan' unless He were stronger than Satan (cp. Mk. 3:23-27). He doesn't take the tack that 'Satan / Beelzebub / demons' don't exist; He showed instead that He was evidently stronger than any such being or force, to the point that belief in such a concept was meaningless. Faith must rather be in Him alone.

The Jews accused the Lord of being in league with the prince of the demons, Beelzebub. His comment was that if the family / house of Satan was so divided, then Satan "has an end" (Mk. 3:26). His approach was 'OK you believe in demons, Beelzebub etc. Well if that's the case, then according to the extension of your logic, Satan will soon come to an end, will cease existence. That's the bottom line. As it happens, I am indeed 'binding the strong man', rendering Satan

powerless, making him 'have an end', and so whichever way you look at it, believing in demons or not, the bottom line is that My miracles demonstrate that effectively Satan is powerless and not an item now'. The way the New Testament is written reflects the same approach. When the Lord was alone with His disciples, He explained further: "If they have called the Master of the House [i.e. Jesus] 'Beelzebub', how much more shall they call them of his household?" [i.e. the disciples] (Mt. 10:25). By saying this, the Lord was clarifying that of course He didn't *really* mean that He was part of the Satan family, working against Satan to destroy the entire family. Rather was He and His family quite separate from the Satan family. But He didn't make that clarification to the Jewish crowds – He simply used their idea and reasoned with them on their own terms. Note in passing how the Jews actually thought Jesus was Beelzebub, or Satan. This would be one explanation for their mad passion to kill Him; for those labelled 'Satan' were hunted to their death in such societies, as seen later in the witch hunts of the middle ages. The Jews say Jesus as a false miracle worker, a false Messiah, a bogus Son of God – all characteristics of their view of 'Satan'. Some centuries later, the Jewish sage Maimonides described Jesus in terms of the antichrist: "Daniel had already alluded to him when he presaged the downfall of a wicked one and a heretic among the Jews who would endeavour to destroy the Law, claim prophecy for himself, make pretences to miracles, and allege that he is the Messiah" (*Maimonides' Epistle to Yemen*). It's been suggested that the way the Jewish rabbinical writings call Him *Yeshu* is an acronym for the Hebrew expression זכרו שמו ימה (*yemach shemo vezichro* – "May his name and memory be obliterated"). This was the very Jewish definition of Satan. They saw Jesus as Satan himself; hence they were so insistent on slaying Him. Yet by the deft twist of Divine providence, it was through the death of Jesus that the *real* Devil (i.e. the power of sin) was in fact slain (Heb. 2:14). To those with perceptive enough minds to see it, yet once again the Jewish ideas had been turned back upon them to reveal the real nature of the Devil to them, within their own frames of reference and terminology. Likewise Beelzebub means literally 'the lord of the house'; and the Lord Jesus alludes to this in describing Himself as the Master of the House of God.

Judaism had taken over the surrounding pagan notion of a personal 'Satan'. And the Lord Jesus and the Gospel writers use this term, but in the way they use it, they redefine it. The parable of the Lord Jesus binding the "strong man" – the Devil – was really to show that the "Devil" as they understood it was now no more, and his supposed Kingdom now taken over by that of Christ. The last Gospel, John, doesn't use the term in the way the earlier Gospels do. He defines what the earlier writers called "the Devil" as actual people, such as the Jews or the brothers of Jesus, in their articulation of an adversarial ['satanic'] position to Jesus.

*Prince-Archon*, "the first", would imply that Beelzebub was also a demon, the "first" or leading one. Thus the fallacy of their argument is the more apparent- if Beelzebub really existed, why would he cast out his own fellow demons?

12:25 *Knew their thoughts*- But they had "said" these things (:24). Perhaps they said these things

within their own minds. Or maybe the contrast is to highlight the upcoming teaching that thoughts are as good as words (:34-37). To hear their words was to know their thoughts.

*Every kingdom-* Again the Lord accepts their position for one moment as true, and yet takes it forward to its logical implication. If Beelzebul was fighting against his own side, then all the same, Satan's Kingdom was divided against itself and would soon crumble into self-destruction. Therefore what Jesus had done ought to be seen as a presage of Satan's Kingdom ending and, by implication, the soon triumph of God's Kingdom.

*Divided-* The Lord Jesus framed His parable about Satan's kingdom rising up and being divided against itself in the very language of the Kingdom of Israel being "divided" against itself by Jeroboam's 'rising up' (1 Kings 12:21; 2 Chron. 13:6)- as if Israel's Kingdom was Satan's kingdom.

*Kingdom... city... house[hold]-* The Lord is teaching that the breakup of a Kingdom, even Satan's, must start on the household level and progress higher. Perhaps this is a hint at the growth of *God's* kingdom beginning with the household conversions and house churches with which Christianity started.

*Brought to desolation-* The Lord only uses the Greek word elsewhere with regard to latter day Babylon's destruction as a result of her followers rising up against her (Rev. 17:16; 18:17,19). This typically been how God destroyed Israel's enemies in the Old Testament- by them turning upon themselves. It follows another great Biblical theme- that those who ultimately will be condemned are in practice self-condemned and bring about their own condemnation.

12:26 *If Satan-* Mark adds that the Lord spoke all this "in parables" (Mk. 3:23). 'Satan' was a parable and is being used here in a non-literal sense. The Lord reasons with them on their own ground, assuming for a moment that their wrong ideas were true- hence "*if* Satan...". The one who cast out Satan / demons was of course Jesus personally. Their false logic and theology had led them to label a good man as Satan just because He did a good work of healing. So quickly, false logic and theology drives jealous people along a path of demonization, negative labelling of others and religious hatred.

*Cast out Satan-* But the argument is about casting out of *demons* (:27). One thing we learn from this use of language is that beliefs about 'Satan', demons and the casting out of demons were very vague and poorly defined. And that is how it is to this day with those who believe in the literal existence of 'Satan' and demons. When pressed for definition and a more connected theology, they flounder.

*Kingdom stand-* Ez. 17:14 uses this language about how Old Testament kingdom of Judah no



longer 'stood' because of their disobedience. The true Kingdom of God would 'stand' for ever (Dan. 2:44). The Lord may be hinting that Israel was no longer God's Kingdom and was in fact therefore Satan's kingdom- for the true Kingdom of God would always stand. It is Satan's Kingdom which falls, not God's.

12:27 *If I*- Three times in succession the Lord uses the "if..." clause. Logic and consequence of position is therefore significant to Him. If it were not, it would totally not matter what we believed about anything.

*Beelzebub*- 2 Kings 1:2 clearly tells us that Beelzebub was a false god of the Philistines. Jesus did not say, 'Now look, 2 Kings 1:2 says Beelzebub was a false god, so your accusation cannot be true'. No, He spoke as if Beelzebub existed, because He was interested in getting His message through to His audience. So in the same way Jesus talked about casting out demons – He did not keep saying, 'actually, they do not exist', He just preached the Gospel in the language of the day.

*Your children cast them out*- The miracles claimed by the Jews would've compared poorly with the Lord's, rather like the attempts by the Egyptian magicians to imitate the miracles of Moses. The Lord never makes that point directly. He accepts that these people claimed to 'cast out demons' and reasons as if that is true- in order to clinch the greater point, that their whole belief system was deeply flawed. It seems to me that this is one reason why the NT writers go along with the idea of demons- to demonstrate by colossal implication that either they do not exist, or they are utterly powerless.

*They shall be your judges*- Their own sons who had claimed to do miracles would be presented at the day of judgment when their lives were examined. The point would be made that they had condemned Jesus for something which their own sons did, and yet they had not condemned *them*, and therefore they would be condemned / judged at the hands of their own sons. Likewise the Lord reasoned that the presence of the Queen of Sheba at judgment day would be a condemnation for some in first century Israel (12:42). Judgment day will not be a mere yes / no encounter. Our lives will be laid bare, specific incidents raised and the implications of them discussed, with the persons involved or implicated standing there giving testimony; or at least, this is how it shall be for the rejected. There is a colossal importance to life and living, to justice, to the implications of actions. It's no good just shrugging and hoping for the best, allowing the passage of time to work a kind of pseudo-atonement, whereby we forget the implications of our actions.

The fact the Pharisees' children cast out demons condemned the Pharisees. Noah's very example was a condemnation of his world (Heb. 11:7); the very existence of believing Gentiles judges the Jews as condemned (Rom. 2:27); and the very existence of the repentant Ninevites condemned first century Israel (Mt. 12:41). The faithful preaching of the Corinthians would judge an unbeliever (1 Cor. 14:24). Noah's very act of righteousness in building the ark condemned / judged those who saw it and didn't respond (Heb. 11:7). This is why the rejected will be shamed before the accepted; they will bow in shame at their feet (Rev. 3:9; 16:15). Perhaps it is in this sense that "we shall judge angels" (1 Cor. 6:3)- rejected ecclesial elders, cp. the angels of the churches in Rev. 2,3? The point is, men's behaviour and conduct judges others because of the contrast it throws upon them. And this was supremely true of the Lord. No wonder in the naked shame and glory of the cross lay the supreme "judgment of this world".

12:28 *By the Spirit*- One reason the Lord did miracles was to try to drive people towards a final decision about Him- see :30. Either He did them by the Spirit, and was therefore attested at God's Messiah and providing a true foretaste of the Messianic Kingdom- or, as the Pharisees claimed, the source of power He was clearly tapping into must be from 'the other side', from evil. The population were therefore faced with a deep choice- either He was who He claimed, or He was an agent of Satan. There was no middle position. It was clear that Jesus, a manual worker from Nazareth, had access to some cosmic power on a scale previously unknown in the earth. The Bible clearly teaches that there is no power but of God. And there is only one God. Those teachings alone make redundant any concept of a personal cosmic Satan and demons. If I had faced off against first century Palestinians deeply persuaded of demonic forces, I think I would've gone down the road of arguing that the God of Israel is omnipotent, quoting Is. 45:7 etc. But the Son of God did it differently. He demonstrated beyond doubt, even by his fiercest enemies, that He had access to superhuman power. He was happy to bear with their idea that there were two 'powers' in the cosmos- of good (from Yahweh) and evil (from Satan). But He then argued that seeing He was doing good, He must therefore have access to that good power. He must, therefore, have unique relationship with Yahweh. Those who clung on to their beliefs in Satan and the power of evil were left with no option but to accept that either He was of Satan, or of God. And seeing His works were *good* (as they grudgingly admit in Jn. 10:33), they really had to accept He was of God. And clearly His power was such that effectively, the supposedly 'evil force' was of no account. The next verse goes on to develop the point- that these miracles were a plundering of the palace of 'Satan', so therefore the power of Jesus was such that He had effectively subdued this being and left 'him' powerless. This was a far more effective path to take than a point blank denial of the existence of any evil power or Satan figure. A comparison of Mt. 12:28 and Lk. 11:20 shows that "the finger of God" and "the spirit of God" are parallel - God in action is His spirit.

*Come unto-* The Greek *phthano* can carry the idea of to anticipate or precede; it is translated "go before" in 1 Thess. 4:15. The Lord's miracles were a foretaste of how the Kingdom of God on earth will be, with no sickness and total healing, spiritually and physically. In the ministry and person of Jesus we see a foretaste of how the Kingdom of God will actually be; and 'the Kingdom' was a title of Christ, so closely was He personally the epitome of that time (Lk. 17:21). If we want to know what the future Kingdom of God on earth will be like- look at the person and actions of Jesus. He was in Himself the proclamation and essence of that Kingdom. The descriptions of a renewed earth in Isaiah focus very much on the physicalities of that time, and at best describe the situation during the initial part of God's Kingdom. But the ultimate spiritual essence of life in eternity is to be found in Jesus as a person.

12:29 *Strong man's house-* 'Beelzebub' can mean 'Lord of the house'. The 'strong man' is clearly 'Satan' in the parable the Lord is creating here (Mk. 3:23). See on :28 *by the Spirit*. And note the allusions to Samson (Jud. 14:18).

The strength of sin, and thereby the extent of the Lord's victory, is brought out by another unreal element in the Lord's picture of "a strong man fully armed [guarding] his own court" (Lk. 11:21 RV). This householder is fanatic; he wanders around fully armed to protect his own courtyard and his goods, rather than getting servants or guards to do it. The Lord being "stronger than he" through the cross was therefore indeed strong.

*Bind the strong man-* The binding of the strong man was already in process, for the Lord's miracles were proof that his goods were being spoiled and he was powerless to stop it. But the ultimate binding of the enemy was in the Lord's death- and several times the records of the Lord's passion use the word to describe how He was 'bound'. Surely He was encouraged by the intended paradox- that through His binding, the power of sin was being bound. The binding of the strong man in the parable was done by the death of Christ. One of the spoils we have taken from his house is the fact we don't need to keep the Mosaic Law (Mt. 12:29 = Col. 2:15).

The idea of Christ binding satan (the "strong man"), stealing his goods and sharing them with His followers is a picture of His victory on the cross. It is full of allusion to Is. 53:12, which says that on account of the fact that Christ would pour out His soul unto death and bear our sins, "he shall divide the spoil with the strong (Heb: 'those that are bound')". With the same thought in mind, Paul spoke of how through the cross, Christ "*spoiled* principalities and powers" (Col. 2:15). It may be that this is one of many examples of the New Testament writers thinking in a Hebrew way, despite writing in Greek. "Principalities and powers" is perhaps an intensive plural, referring to the *great* principality and power, i.e. Satan. The way He 'triumphed over them in himself' (Gk. + AVmg.) would certainly make more sense if they referred to the Biblical devil / satan which was overcome within Christ (cp. the language of Heb. 2:14-18; 1 Pet. 2:24). Eph.

2:15,16 appears to be parallel to Col. 2:15. It speaks of how Christ "abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments... for to make *in himself* of twain one new man, so making peace; and that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby". Col. 2:15 speaks of the Lord on the cross as the victorious champion, killing "principalities and powers" and then triumphing over them by sharing their spoils with his soldiers. Eph. 2:15 speaks of Christ on the cross "slaying the enmity" (the Biblical Devil) and achieving peace and reconciliation for all those within His body. Yet in the immediate context, the Lord is offering an explanation of why His miracles proved He was the Messiah. He hadn't yet died on the cross; but He was doing the works which were possible as a result of the binding of Satan which He would then achieve. This is yet another example of the Lord's confidence that He would overcome, and God going along with Him in this. The Lord's miracles were a physical foretaste of the great spiritual blessings which would be made available as a result of the binding of Satan by Christ's death and resurrection.

*Spoil his goods*- The same word is used in Mt. 11:12 of how the Kingdom of God is being "taken by force" by those entering into it. The "spoils" of Satan are those things which he has taken away; surely the spoils taken from Satan by Christ refer to the righteousness which our nature takes away from us. Lk. 11:22 adds another detail to the story. The "armour" of Satan which he depends upon is taken away by Christ on the cross, and then Satan is bound, and his spoils shared out. The armour of Satan is the antithesis of the armour of righteousness (Eph. 6:11,13). As the Kingdom of God has a God who dwells in darkness, a Prince, an armour, a Christ, a dominion, a will and spirit, fruits, rewards etc., so does the kingdom of (the personified) Satan. The armour of righteousness is the fruit of the Spirit, the righteous characteristics of the Spirit. The armour of Satan is the fruits of the flesh nature. These have been taken away by Christ, He has bound Satan, and therefore what Satan has robbed us of, the fruits of righteousness, his spoils, can be taken at will by the Lord Jesus. We have shown that Christ was alluding to Is. 53:12, which says that through the cross, Christ divides the spoil with the bound ones, i.e. us. In this lies a paradox. Binding is associated with sin (Ps. 68:6; Is. 61:1; Lam. 1:14; Lk. 13:16). We are bound, in many ways, intrinsically limited by our own natures. Only at the second coming will Satan be bound, i.e. the Lord's personal achievement will be physically shared with the world (Rev. 20:2). Yet we, the bound ones, are given the goods which the Lord personally took away from the bound Satan. Those goods are the righteous attributes which our natures stop us possessing as we should. The dividing of the spoils to us by the victorious Lord (Lk. 11:22; Is. 53:12) recalls how the Lord divided *all* His goods between His servants (Mt. 25:14), the dividing of *all* the Father's goods between the sons (representing the good and bad believers, Lk. 15:12).

We have elsewhere shown that these goods refer to the various aspects of the supreme righteousness of Christ which are divided between the body of Christ. The spoils divided to us by the Lord are the various aspects of righteousness which He took for Himself from Satan. The picture of a bound strong man having his house ransacked before his eyes carries with it the idea

of suspense, of daring, of doing something absolutely impossible. And so the idea of Christ really taking the righteousness which the Satan of our very natures denies us, and giving these things to us, is almost too much to believe. It is normally the fellow-soldiers who share the spoils (cp. Heb. 7:4). But we didn't even fight; the spoils are divided amongst the bound ones (Is. 53:12 Heb.). Satan in general is still unbound (cp. Rev. 20:2). Christ bound the Satan within Himself personally, and took the spoils of victory for Himself. Col. 2:15 says that Christ "spoiled" as a result of His victory on the cross; and the Greek specifically means 'to completely divest *for oneself*'. He is being painted as the lone hero who took it all for Himself; of the people there was none with Him in His great battle on the cross (Is. 63:3). And indeed, He was the lone hero. But the point is that He has shared with us the spoils of righteousness which He took for Himself as a result, even though we are not worthy to receive them. Seeing the teaching of the Lord is just outline principle, it is evident that through His death He gained possession of absolute righteousness, and then shared this with us. In the first century, the outward demonstration of this was in the miraculous gifts of the Spirit. "He led captivity captive (more language of the heroic victor), and gave gifts unto men", the miraculous gifts, in the first century context (Eph. 4:8,11). But what was taken away from Satan was not only power over illness. If this was the main meaning of Satan being bound and his spoils shared with us, then it would follow that the effect of Christ's binding of Satan was only in the first century; for those miraculous gifts of the Spirit are no longer available; illness still triumphs over God's people. The spoils of Satan refer to the righteousness which Satan limits and denies. It is this which has been taken from him, and divided to us all as a result of the cross. The miracles of the first century were a physical reflection of this, just as the rending of the temple veil and resurrection of some dead saints was a physical foretaste of the spiritual possibilities opened up by the Lord's death. There are many references to the spiritual blessings which are even now mediated to us (as the whole body of Christ) on account of the Lord's death; we (as a community) are given peace and "eternal life" (Jn. 14:27; 17:2; 1 Jn. 5:11), knowledge (2 Cor. 4:6), wisdom (Eph. 1:17; James 1:15), peace (2 Thess. 3:16), understanding (1 Cor. 2:12; 2 Tim. 2:7), love in our hearts (Rom. 5:5), grace (Eph. 4:7), comfort (2 Thess. 2:16), righteousness (Rom. 5:16,17), confidence (2 Tim. 1:7), sexual self-restraint (1 Cor. 7:7). All the different aspects of the 100% righteousness of our Lord, *all* His goods, the spoils He personally took from Satan, are divided up amongst ourselves, some having spiritual possibilities in one area, others in another. As a community we are counted as if we have overcome the world, overcome Satan, as Christ did, although on a human level we are still bound (Jn. 16:33 cp. 1 Jn. 2:13,14; 5:4). Only at the day of judgment will we have overcome all (Rev. 21:7 cp. Lk. 11:22 s.w.), but we are treated as if we have already done so.

*Goods*- If indeed sickness was caused by Satan's power, then the Lord's miracles were a spoiling of his goods. The language here is clearly parabolic- including the reference to 'Satan'. But the miracles were an invitation to others to come and share in the victory the Lord Jesus had won over the 'strong man'; and this provides the context for the 'gathering' of the next verse.

12:30 *Not with Me is against Me*- The original is memorable- either *meta* Me, or *kata* Me. The Lord is speaking here from *His* perspective. For He Himself observed that Judas 'ate *with Me*', but lifted up his heel '*against Me*' (Jn. 13:18). It's simply not so that all those who claim to be with the Lord are therefore with Him and on the same side as we who know we are in truth 'with Him. He is simply observing an ultimate truth- that finally, there will be (and therefore is not now) any middle position in relation to Him. It's not therefore for us to insist that anyone who claims to be 'with Him' is so merely because they say so. Let His words sink in to you personally: "He who is not with me is against me... he that is not against us is for us" (Mt. 12:30; Mk. 9:40). We may think we are not against the Lord's cause, even if we're not as committed to it as we might be; many an unbaptized young person has told me this. But to be 'not against' Jesus means we must be *with Him*. Nobody can be passively 'not against' Jesus. If we're not whole heartedly with Him, we're against Him. That's how His demanding logic goes. A relationship with Him demands the whole person; *you*, your very heart and essence.

*Gathers*- In connection with the gathering of spoil from the strong man's house in :29. There is a tendency to use this verse as a general statement of principle, but the surrounding context is specifically about the Lord's healing miracles being part of the spoil He has plundered from the 'Lord of the house', Beelzebub / Satan. We saw on :28 that people were faced with the choice of accepting the Lord's miracles were performed using either God's power, or Satan's. The whole issue pushed the audience to a crucial choice- of accepting of Jesus as God's special Son, or as Satan. The miracles were proof that the Lord Jesus had bound the power of Satan- the power which people believed was behind illness. If you didn't want to go and gather the spoil, then you were actively scattering it abroad. This hyperbole was used to force all the cautious people who remained undecided to realize that ultimately, there is no such thing as agnosticism. If you are not eagerly gathering the spoil the Lord has now released, then you are actively working against Him.

12:31 *All manner of sin... shall be forgiven*- His simple claim that God can forgive men all sins was radical (see the parallel Mk. 3:28)- for the Rabbis had a whole list of unforgivable sins, like murder, apostasy, contempt for the Law, etc. But the Lord went further. His many words of judgment weren't directed to the murderers and whores and Sabbath breakers; they were instead directed against those who condemned those people, considering themselves righteous. He calls those who appeared so righteous a 'generation of vipers'. The publican, not the Pharisee, finds God's acceptance, according to Jesus. And again, the Lord is making a telling point- because Rabbis held that repentance for publicans was almost impossible, because it was impossible for them to know exactly all the people they'd cheated. Very clearly, the Lord's message was radical. He was out to form a holy people from whores and gamblers, no-good boys and comen. And moreover, He was out to show that what God especially judges and hates are the things that

humanity doesn't think twice about: hypocrisy, self-righteousness, judgmentalism, exclusion of others... See on 10:29.

*Blasphemy against the Spirit*- The exposition offered above suggests that people were forced to a choice. Jesus of Nazareth had access to superhuman power, far more than anyone had ever had. Which power was it, within the framework of their dualistic view of the cosmos- of Satan or God? Was He God's supreme agent on earth- or Satan's? There was no middle ground. All had to choose. The miracles were good. Therefore, it was Satan who had been bound. Jesus was therefore of God. To insist He was from Satan was to wilfully refuse to believe the evidence God had placed before them. There was no forgiveness for this choice- whilst it continued. If anyone wanted to repent and accept that Jesus was of God, to gather with Him, to be with Him rather than against Him- then that was always possible. Note that there is no statement that *repentance* is impossible, rather that *forgiveness* is impossible whilst a person is in the position of so strongly rejecting Christ as God's Son. For those who did accept Christ as of God rather than of Satan, then "all manner of sin" could be forgiven them, including even at times speaking against Him personally (:32). From one viewpoint, the only way we cannot be saved is to wilfully refuse to participate in the new covenant. The Lord laboured the point that the "unforgivable sin" was to "blaspheme the Holy Spirit" (Mk. 3:28-30; Mt. 12:31-37; Lk. 12:10). But it's been demonstrated that this is a reference to Jewish writings and traditions such as Jubilees 15:33 "where not circumcising one's child is unforgivable, because it is a declaration that one does not belong to the covenant people".

12:32 *Speaks a word against the Son of Man*- See on :31. The sin of stating that Jesus was Satan's agent rather than God's could not be forgiven whilst it continued to be the position of a person- although repentance was always possible. For those who had accepted Jesus as God's unique agent, they can be forgiven all manner of failure (:31), including speaking "a word" against Him. Maybe the Lord foresaw the situations in which persecution could be avoided for an apparently few words calling Him accursed. And He, along with Matthew, wanted to assure those who would do this in the weakness of a moment that in fact they had *not* blasphemed the Spirit and were not beyond forgiveness. The 'speaking against' is clearly parallel to 'blaspheming'. Blaspheming the name of Jesus was and is required by various anti-Christian regimes such from Judaism through the Roman empire to fundamentalist Islamic states today. Surely the Lord had this in mind. And the encouragement is that this is forgivable. But to decide He is not the Son of God but the embodiment of evil is a situation for which there is no forgiveness because it is wilfully continued in. The Lord has just stated that whoever is not with Him is against Him (:30), but here He foresees a situation when one of those who is ultimately 'with Him' will speak 'against Him'- and yet be forgiven. Because that moment of failure was not the overall position of a man's life. The denials by Peter, replete with curses / blasphemy, would surely be the parade example.

*Against the son of man-* The “son of man” here could refer to Jesus, but it could just as comfortably mean ‘human beings’. One angle on this passage is to remember that the Gospels were written as a means of preaching to Jewish people at some point after the Lord’s resurrection. The message may be: ‘Whatever sin you committed against Jesus, even to the point of crucifixion, is forgivable. But now the Holy Spirit is witnessing to you through the apostles to repent and accept His forgiveness. If you refuse *that*, then there will [obviously] be no forgiveness for you’. The Lord foresaw the situation as it would be in the lives of his audience, and that explains His language here.

*Shall not be forgiven-* Whenever we sin, we are judged by the court of Heaven as deserving condemnation. Yet now is our day of opportunity; the verdict really is given, but we can mercifully change it. Consider the implications of the parallel Mk. 3:29: "he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Spirit hath never forgiveness but is in danger of *eternal* damnation". Not being *ever* forgiven is paralleled with having *eternal* damnation. The implication is that when we sin and are unforgiven, we are condemned. But in this life we can be forgiven, and therefore become uncondemned. Abimelech was "but a dead man" for taking Sarah (Gen. 20:3), as if although he was alive, for that sin he was in God's eyes condemned and dead. But that verdict for that case was changed by his change of the situation.

*Neither in this world, neither in the world to come-* This is not suggesting that there is some kind of forgiveness in this world and another kind of forgiveness in the world to come, the Kingdom age. Rather is the simple point being made that the forgiveness granted or not granted now is directly related to "the world to come". The judgment is as it were ongoing now. The positions we adopt now are those we shall eternally hold.