

THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Kingdom: A Study of Matthew 8–13

STUDY FOURTEEN

God's Servant or Satan's Pawn?

Matthew 12:15–30

Jesus knows the Pharisees are plotting to kill Him, but He continues to show compassion, understanding, goodness, grace, and justice. For His name will be the hope of the world.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

THE Pharisees always viewed Jesus with jealous eyes—envying His popularity, resenting His teaching, scorning His claims. But Jesus' latest defiance of their Sabbath laws and His claim to be “Lord, even over the Sabbath” (Matthew 12:8) set their teeth on edge. According to Luke's account, “the enemies of Jesus were wild with rage” (Luke 6:11) . . . *a murderous kind of rage.*

Jesus' healing a man on the Sabbath in the synagogue and right in front of them was the final straw. “The Pharisees called a meeting to plot how to kill Jesus” (Matthew 12:14). With this brief but chilling statement, Matthew marked the point of no return for the Pharisees.

What would we do if powerful people hung a bullseye on our backs? Call the police? Plot revenge? Run and hide? In Matthew 12:15–30, we'll see Jesus' steady and focused response. Even while the Pharisees plotted, God was working out His plan to redeem the world.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

The power-obsessed Pharisees thought they held Jesus' life in their hands, but Christ never relinquished His rule as King. Pray for insight into the nature of Jesus and for a deeper understanding of His Word through your study.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

God's Servant or Satan's Pawn?

Matthew 12:15–30



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Read *Matthew 12:15–30*. Note how Jesus calmly continued His messianic ministry while knowing that the Pharisees were conspiring against Him. What character qualities shine through Jesus' actions in this passage?



Observation: General Description and Specific Incident

In the observation phase of *Searching the Scriptures*, we look for main verbs and repeating phrases, such as, “Jesus knew what they were planning” (Matthew 12:15) and “Jesus knew their thoughts” (12:25). We also look for parallel structures, such as the “if” statements Jesus used in His response to the Pharisees: “if Satan is casting out Satan” (12:26), “if I am empowered by Satan” (12:27), and “but if I am casting out demons by the Spirit of God” (12:28).¹ Observe how this passage flows from general to specific—Jesus healing *many* people to *one* person and Jesus' *broad* warning to His address on a *specific* subject. Let's dig in!

A General Description of Jesus' Ministry—Matthew 12:15–21

Jesus “knew what [the Pharisees] were planning” in secret (Matthew 12:15). As the Son of God, He could see behind their closed doors and hear their treacherous whispers, and He could have mounted a resistance movement to destroy them. But, according to *Matthew 12:15–16*, where did He go and what did He do? What did He say to those He healed?



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Jesus' reluctance to fire up a coup didn't surprise Matthew who knew the Scriptures. The prophet Isaiah had foretold the Messiah's gentle spirit and determination to fulfill His mission. According to *Matthew 12:17–21*, what did Isaiah say about the Messiah, and how did Jesus mirror these prophecies?

Months earlier, when Jesus launched His ministry, Matthew cited the prophecy of the Messiah filling the "Galilee of the Gentiles" with glory (*Matthew 4:14–16 NASB*). From the beginning, Jesus yearned for the Gentile nations. Now that Israel's religious leaders had officially rejected the messianic kingdom, it was time for Christ to offer Himself to the world.

What do you see in Isaiah's prophecy in *12:17–21* that reflects a shift from going "only to the people of Israel—God's lost sheep" (Matthew 10:6) to going to lost sheep everywhere?

Who wouldn't be attracted to a Savior like Jesus? He had all the power of the Godhead but never once threw Himself around like some kind of superman. He lived under Spirit-directed restraint. He was meek and lowly of heart, and by following Him, we find rest for our souls. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

A Specific Incident That Sparked Controversy—Matthew 12:22–30

From the many whom Jesus healed, Matthew narrowed the focus to one demonized man who could not see or speak. When Jesus healed him, the people wondered whether Jesus was the Messiah. After all, Isaiah had foretold the miracle that Jesus had just performed!



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*And when he comes, he will open the eyes of the blind
and unplug the ears of the deaf.
The lame will leap like a deer,
and those who cannot speak will sing for joy! (Isaiah 35:5–6)*

What did the people ask, and how did the Pharisees shut down any discussion of Jesus being the Messiah (*Matthew 12:22–24*)?

Ironically, the Pharisees resembled the demon Jesus cast out. How were they trying to blind the people to the truth and mute the voices of those saying Jesus was the Messiah?

As the Pharisees quietly spread their poison through the crowd, Jesus “knew their thoughts,” even though He may not have heard their murmuring (12:25). Previously, when the Pharisees made this same accusation, Jesus said nothing (9:32–34). But this time, perhaps for the sake of those in the crowd whose hearts were open, He gave an impromptu rebuttal. Can you see the three points Jesus made in His argument (12:25–29)? Summarize them in the space below.²



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Matthew 12:15–30

How did Jesus' conclusion draw a line in the sand (*Matthew 12:30*)?

"You're either for me or you're against Me," Jesus said. There can be no straddling fences. You're either a believer or an unbeliever. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: A Clash of Kingdoms

Jesus' three arguments proving His divine authority pulled back the curtain on the unseen spiritual conflict between God and Satan. A popular misunderstanding today is that the forces of God and the devil are equal in power and are locked in a perpetual battle of good versus evil. This misunderstanding, however, has its roots in Eastern spirituality not biblical orthodoxy.

Read the excursus, "God vs. Satan," on page 247 in Pastor Chuck Swindoll's commentary, *Insights on Matthew 1–15*. In the space below, write down your notes on what the Bible teaches about Satan and his ultimate submission to God.



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Defeated at the cross, the devil's only recourse is to try to dishearten and intimidate Christ's followers. He may try to destroy us, but Jesus has promised, "I will build my church, and *all the powers of hell will not conquer it*" (Matthew 16:18, emphasis added). What do other passages of Scripture teach about our enemy and the confidence we have in our King? Let's take a look.



Correlation: Scriptural Truths about Spiritual Warfare

While Satan and demons would have us believe they are all-powerful, they *must* obey the word of Christ. Read [Luke 10:17](#) and [1 John 4:4](#) and write a principle based on the truth of Christ's authority over the forces of darkness.

Now let's explore what other passages say concerning spiritual warfare. First, what does [2 Corinthians 4:4](#) teach about Satan's influence in the world?

How does [Ephesians 6:10–12](#) clarify our role in defeating Satan?



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What does *Colossians 1:13–14* say Christ did for us when He saved us?

Spiritual battles do rage around us in the unseen world, but we can stride with confidence under the banner of our King. Never forget that Christ is on our side, and with just a word, He always wins.

Application: Personal Response

When Jesus raised His divine scepter and cast out the demon “by the Spirit of God” (Matthew 12:28), the air practically pulsated with the power of the messianic kingdom. Tragically, the Pharisees falsely attributed the Holy Spirit’s power to Satan, committing the ultimate sin of blasphemy and turning their backs on Jesus. In the end, they were the pawns of Satan.

In the next study, we’ll see the terrible consequences of the Pharisees’ disbelief. Until then, reflect on Jesus’ challenge which Matthew placed at the center of chapter 12 like a lighthouse on the point of a peninsula:

“Anyone who isn’t with me opposes me, and anyone who isn’t working with me is actually working against me.” (12:30)

Jesus’ words flash a warning but also broadcast an invitation. He calls us to march under His flag and submit to Him as King. Use the space below to express in prayer your loyalty to Christ. Confess your commitment to walk with Him and join Him in His campaign to call people out of Satan’s kingdom of darkness into God’s kingdom of light.



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Jesus truly is “the hope of all the world” (Matthew 12:21). Only by the authority of His name can justice prevail and the forces of evil be vanquished. Let's proclaim His kingdom wherever we go!



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for rescuing me from the domain of darkness and bringing me into the kingdom of Your Son. May my loyalty always lie with Your Son as my Sovereign, and may I walk daily in the power of Your Spirit, who fills me with Your presence and gives me hope of ultimate victory when Your kingdom comes. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, “*How to Study the Bible for Yourself*.”
2. If you need help with the answer, here is Jesus' basic outline: first, Satan would be defeating his own purposes if he empowered Jesus to cast out demons; second, the Pharisees would have to accuse their exorcists of being empowered by Satan too; third, only God is strong enough to overpower Satan, so Jesus must be of God.

