November 1, 2026
Pursuing the Kingdom: When the Heart Speaks
Matthew 12:22-37
Vernon Advent Christian Church

Have you ever said something in a moment of frustration and then immediately wished you could take it back? Perhaps you spoke too quickly or responded harshly and said something that revealed an attitude you would have rather kept hidden. You see, our words have a funny way of revealing what's truly in our hearts. We can try and carefully manage what people see on the outside, but eventually our words and actions reveal what is happening within us. And pressure that comes by way of other people or by our circumstances has a way of exposing what we more easily conceal when things are going well.

And Jesus addresses this deeper issue of the heart in Matthew 12:22–37. The passage follows Matthew's description of Jesus as the promised Servant of the Lord, the One who brings justice to the nations and treats the weak with compassion. Now, we see Jesus' authority and compassion on full display in another miracle. Yet, as we've seen over the last couple of chapters, instead of everyone responding to Him in faith, this miracle becomes another occasion for the religious leaders to accuse him and deny who He is.

And as we work through this passage together, we will be left to consider this central question: When we encounter the authority of Jesus, will we respond with humble faith or will we resist Him because He challenges what we want to believe? So, if your are able, please stand as I read the Word of God found in Matthew 12:22-37. [Read Passage]

Matthew begins by telling us that a man who was blind and mute was brought to Jesus. The word translated "demon-oppressed" literally means "demonized" or "under the power of a demon." Your translation may say "demon-possessed," but either way, the point is that Jesus healed him by casting out the demon, restoring both his speech and sight.

What had been impossible for this man was accomplished through the authority of Jesus. It is yet another demonstration of who He truly is. And, understandably, the crowd was astonished. And they began asking whether Jesus could be the Son of David, the title rooted in God's messianic promise concerning David's royal line. The prophets had anticipated a coming King who would reign according to God's purposes and the people were wondering whether Jesus might be that promised Messiah.

And their question is significant. They are beginning to recognize that Jesus' works point beyond the ordinary and His authority over sickness and demonic forces gives evidence that God's promised kingdom has drawn near.

But notice the contrast between the reaction of the crowd and the Pharisees. The crowd asks whether Jesus might be the Son of David. But the Pharisees respond by claiming that Jesus casts out demons through Beelzebul, the ruler, or prince of demons. And, again, rather than acknowledging what they have clearly seen, they attempt to discredit the source of the miracle. They cannot deny that something miraculous has happened, so they attack the authority behind it.

And the Pharisees' rejection of Jesus reaches its absolute peak of desperation here in this verse. Now, Beelzebul, originally derived from Baal-Zebub, the ancient Philistine deity meaning "Lord of the Flies," the name had evolved by the time of Jesus into a derogatory title for Satan himself, essentially designating him as "Beelzebul," the "lord of filth or dung." So, they are literally accusing Jesus of working for the devil.

And this desperate deflection exposes a terrifying reality. When a heart is fiercely committed to its own prideful understanding, it will deliberately call light darkness and categorize the very Spirit of God as demonic just to avoid surrendering to the authority of Christ.

This should make us careful about how we respond when the Word of God challenges us. We may not always understand what Jesus teaches, and honest questions are not the same as unbelief. But we must be willing to let God's Word correct us when we are confronted by it. I remind you of the quote from Pastor/Podcaster Josh Howerton which I shared a few weeks ago, "When you come to a point in the Bible in which you disagree, you're wrong." If we approach Scripture only to find support for what we already believe, we risk missing what God is actually saying.

The Pharisees had already made up their mind that Jesus was not the promised Messiah, so there has to be another explanation. And so they attempt to discredit His power. And Jesus now shows why their accusation makes no sense and why His ministry is actually evidence that God's kingdom has arrived.

Starting in vs. 25, we're told that Jesus knows the Pharisees' thoughts and then goes on to point out the absurdity of their charge and makes the famous argument that a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand. His point is that if it is by Satan that He is casting out a demon, then Satan is working against his own purposes. And if Satan were casting out his own demons, his kingdom would be fighting itself, fracturing from within and unable to survive.

And so, Jesus then applies the same reasoning to the Pharisees' own followers in vs. 27. If they accept that their "sons," referring to the disciples or followers of the Pharisees, were able cast out demons, they must explain why they judge Jesus by a different standard. You see, their accusation reveals, not a careful examination of the evidence, but a pre-determined mind to reject Him.

But then, Jesus makes a definitive statement as he lays it all on the line in vs. 28, "But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you." And this is the very heart of the passage. Jesus is not just some miracle worker with unusual abilities. His gospel message and miracles demonstrate that God's promised kingdom is breaking into the world. And through the power of the Spirit, Jesus is confronting evil, liberating the oppressed and demonstrating the authority of the kingdom He has come to establish.

And Jesus illustrates His point, beginning in vs. 29, with the picture of a strong man guarding his house. And he says that before someone can enter the house and steal the strong man's possessions, the strong man must first be restrained or tied up. Jesus' point is that He is the one breaking into the house as ultimate rescuer and that Satan is the 'strong man' who has been tied up. And if He is going to rescue the people Satan is holding captive, his possession, you can't just sneak past him, you have to overpower him first.

The Pharisees were accusing Jesus of working with the enemy, but Jesus sets them straight. He explains that you can't plunder a strong man's house unless you bind him first. By casting out demons and healing the broken, Jesus wasn't negotiating with darkness. He was walking right into the enemy's territory, binding his hands and reclaiming the lives he had captured. For us today, this means we aren't fighting a losing battle. The enemy's power has been restricted, the strong man is bound, and Christ has already broken his grip on our lives to set us free. Praise His name!

Then Jesus makes the issue personal. He says in vs. 30, referring back to that dividing line I referenced earlier, that "whoever is not with Me is against Me, and whoever does not gather with Me scatters." Now, that statement leaves little room for neutrality. We cannot treat Jesus as just a good, religious teacher whose teachings we may appreciate while remaining indifferent to His authority. His own words do not allow that. He calls for a response. [C.S. Lewis quote…]

Now, there's a difference between struggling to understand Jesus and refusing to submit to Him. A person may have honest questions but still be moving toward faith. The disciples themselves needed time to understand who Jesus was. But Jesus does not invite us to remain permanently undecided about His lordship. He calls us to trust Him and follow Him. There is no middle ground.

Jesus is not simply offering one path among many alternatives. He is declaring that God's kingdom has arrived through Him and that our response to Him matters eternally. Brothers and sisters, there are only two roads in this life and every human being is one or the other. And we read about them in Matt. 7:13-14. One is the "…broad [road] that leads to destruction and many enter through it. But narrow is the road that leads to life, and only a few find it." And Jesus refers to himself as this one way or road when He says of himself in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but by Me."

And this truth should shape how we think about how we share the gospel with people. We're not simply inviting people to adopt a religious preference or join a church community. We are inviting them to be reconciled to God through His Son, to receive forgiveness and to live a life of true freedom under the gracious reign of King Jesus.

The good news of the gospel is that the King who calls us to follow Him is also the Savior who came into the strong man's house to rescue us. The One who has power over evil is able to forgive our sins, free us from slavery to sin and lead us into a new life.

Now that this Jesus has shown that His ministry reveals the arrival of God's kingdom, the Pharisees' response raises a more serious question. What happens when people toe the dangerous line between spiritual blindness and defiance? And it's here that Jesus now gives one of the most solemn warnings in the Gospel of Matthew and our response has eternal significance.

To really grasp what Jesus is saying in vs. 31–32, we have to look back at what just happened. Jesus had just healed a man who was blind and mute leaving the crowds absolutely amazed and wondering if He might be the long-awaited Messiah. But the Pharisees, blinded spiritually by their own pride and legalism, couldn't deny the miracle, so they did something terrifying instead. They attributed the clear, undeniable power of God to Satan, the prince of demons.

When Jesus begins vs. 31 with the word "Therefore," He is drawing a direct line from their hateful accusation to a dead-serious warning. He is essentially saying, "Because you have looked at pure goodness and deliverance, and called it demonic, we need to talk about the state of your souls, what's really going on in your hearts."

And He draws a stark contrast here, noting that a person can misunderstand or speak against the "Son of Man," perhaps tripped up by His veiled humanity or humble appearance, and still find mercy. But to look at the undeniable work of the Holy Spirit and call it satanic is a completely different territory.

This brings us to one of the most debated and anxiety-inducing concepts in the entire New Testament, the unforgivable sin, or blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Over the centuries, theologians have understood this warning through a few different lenses. The first is the view which suggests that the sin being described here as a deliberate rejection of Christ's miracles by attributing the Holy Spirit's work to Satan. Because their hearts are completely hardened, they cut off the only avenue through which they could ever repent.

A second, broader view, that really encapsulates the first as its only logical conclusion, describing not a one-time event but a lifetime of rejection. This view was championed by theologians like Augustine and many of the Reformers, is the idea of "final impenitence." The argument is that the unforgivable sin is simply continuing in unbelief and refusing God's grace revealed by the Spirit all the way up until your final breath.

Because the Holy Spirit's main ministry is to testify of Jesus (He will testify of Me, John 15:26). And when that testimony of Jesus is fully and finally rejected, one has truly blasphemed the Holy Spirit and essentially called Him a liar in respect to His testimony about who Jesus is.

While these interpretations sound incredibly heavy, and they are, the takeaway is actually deeply reassuring for those who may be wrestling with the fear of committing this sin. If you are anxious about your standing with God, it means your conscience is still tender and the Holy Spirit is still actively working, convicting and drawing you close. Jesus' warning isn't a trap meant to catch well-meaning believers who stumbled or said the wrong thing in a moment of doubt. Its meant to be a mirror held up to the arrogant and defiant person who are actively choosing to close their eyes to the truth.

After Jesus warns the Pharisees about the seriousness of resisting God's Spirit, He now connects what's going on in their hearts and how that becomes visible in their everyday lives. For the words we speak matter because they often reveal what we truly value and what is taking root within us.

And He does so by turning to the imagery of trees and their fruit in vs. 33. He makes the, seemingly, obvious point that a healthy tree produces good fruit, while a diseased tree produces bad fruit. His point is not to make us expert gardeners. His point is that the fruit doesn't make the tree healthy or unhealthy. But the fruit reveals the condition of the tree itself.

And Jesus applies that picture to the Pharisees. Their words reveal what is happening inside them. They have witnessed a work of mercy and power, yet they have spoken of it as though it came from Satan. Their words expose a heart that has become hostile to the truth and in open rebellion against the God they claimed to serve.

And then comes the ultimate diss in vs. 34, a name he will use only one other time when describing the Pharisees, Jesus calls them, “a brood of vipers.” A brood is the offring of animals that have been hatched together, so, essentially, Jesus is calling them “sons of Satan.” Which was not doubt on purpose because they were more associated with the serpent from Eden then they were with God. For it was it was the evil nature of their hearts that made them speak evil of Jesus.

Which is the point of Jesus’ question, “how can you can speak good when you are evil.” He then he brings his point home when he says at the end of vs. 34, “For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.” This is one of the most piercing statements in Scripture. For our words are not just sounds that disappear once they have been spoken. They reveal our attitudes, our loyalties and the things we have allowed to shape who we are.

You see, a heart filled with resentment will eventually speak resentful words. A heart consumed by pride will find ways to tear others down. And on the flipside, a heart filled with gratitude will increasingly express thankfulness. And a heart shaped by the grace of Christ will speak with truth, humility and love.

Of course, we all struggle with sin and say things we regret. And a single careless remark does not tell the whole story of a person's life. The point is not that every word of every sentence we speak perfectly reveals our deepest character. Rather, how we speak can expose what we need to bring before God.

Imagine a cup filled with water. When someone bumps up against the cup, the water spills out. We might blame the person that bumped up against us, but the water came out because it was already in the cup. In a similar way, difficult circumstances often reveal what has been filling up our hearts.

Now, again, this does not mean that every emotional reaction is sinful or that we should never express anger, grief, or disagreement. Jesus Himself expressed righteous anger and deep sorrow. He literally just called the Pharisees a “brood of vipers” and I don’t imagine it was in the friendliest tone. The question is whether our responses are shaped by the character of God or controlled by selfishness, pride and resentment for that’s the difference.

Jesus goes even further in vs. 36, warning that people will give account for every careless word they speak. This is a serious reminder that God cares about how we use our words. Our words can encourage or discourage, heal or wound, clarify truth or distort it. And they can point people toward Christ or push them away.

The Bible consistently emphasizes the power of our words. Proverbs teaches that life and death are in the power of the tongue. (Prov. 18:21) James compares the tongue to a small fire that can set a great forest ablaze. (James 3:5-6) You see, a few words can damage a relationship that took years to build. A cruel comment can remain in someone's memory long after the speaker has forgotten it. On the other hand, a word of encouragement at just the right time can have a lasting impact and strengthen someone who is close to giving up.

And this should lead us to examine how we use our words in several different areas. How do we talk about people who have hurt us? What do we say when we are frustrated with our spouse or children? How do we speak to, or about, people when we disagree with them? How do we communicate online when we can hide behind our screens with no real

sense of accountability? Are our words marked by honesty, grace and self-control? Or, do they reveal a rebellious heart that needs to submit to God?

Jesus concludes in vs. 37 by saying that we will be justified or condemned by our words. In context, He is emphasizing that our words serve as evidence of the condition of our hearts and that God will judge us righteously. This is not a teaching that words alone can save us. Scripture is clear that salvation comes by God's grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. But genuine faith does not leave the heart untouched. As God transforms us, the words that we speak should increasingly reflect the life He is producing within us.

The solution, then, is not simply to use better words or memorize better things to say. For, as Jesus points out elsewhere in the gospels, that is like putting lipstick on a pig or washing the outside of a casket. No, we need God to transform our hearts. We need to confess our bitterness, surrender our pride, receive His forgiveness and allow His Word to renew our hearts and minds. And then from there, our words will begin to reflect a transformed heart.

We can sum up Jesus' words this way. We cannot consistently produce the fruit of Christ-likeness while deliberately nurturing a heart that resists Christ. We must bring both our words and our hearts before Him.

And so this passage confronts us with the reality that we cannot remain indifferent to Jesus. His works reveal who He is and calls for a response. His warning reminds us of the seriousness of resisting God's truth. And His teaching about our words exposes the condition of our hearts.

So, let us trust Him, follow Him and allow His truth to shape the way we live and speak. And as we continue pursuing the kingdom of God, may our hearts be increasingly surrendered to Christ and may our words bear witness to the goodness of the King we serve. Let's pray and prepare our hearts for the Lord's table.

Closing Prayer:

Heavenly Father, we come before You and confess that our words and actions often reveal hearts that need Your grace. Forgive us for the times we have resisted Your truth, spoken carelessly or failed to honor Christ as Lord.

Thank You that although our hearts have been marked by sin, we have forgiveness and new life through Your Son Jesus. As we prepare to share in communion, help us remember the incredible price Jesus paid for our redemption. His body was broken, and His blood was poured out so that we can be forgiven and brought into fellowship with You.

Lord, as we take the bread and the cup, turn our attention away from ourselves and toward Christ. Help us examine our hearts, confess our sins and remember the depth of Your love. May this time strengthen our faith and remind us that our hope is not in our goodness, our words, or our religious performance, but entirely in the finished work of Jesus.

We remember His death, we celebrate His resurrection, and we look forward to His soon return. May our lives, our words, and our worship bear witness to the grace we have received. We pray all this in the name of Jesus our Savior and King. Amen.