

Jesus is Charged with Sorcery

Matthew 12:22-37

Pastor Tom
March 6, 2016

On Thursday, August 5, 2010, 33 miners and technical support workers had stopped for a lunch break inside a mine in Copiapó, Chile. Little did they know they were about to begin the most intense experience of their lives. The mine suffered a significant collapse a few moments later and trapped them 700 m or 2300 feet underground. They were also 5 km from the mine's entrance which had multiple sloped passage ways to get up and down the mine. The mine's owners had a long record of safety violations and accidents. 8 had died in the 12 years before this accident. As a result, it was originally thought that these 33 had not survived the collapse or would probably starve to death before they were found, if ever.

For 17 days, no sign of life was heard or found. But on August 22, a drill bit brought good news. On it was taped a note written in bold letters that read "We are well in the shelter the 33." Suddenly hope was restored and the Chilean population demanded that the government find a way to rescue the miners.

The government then implemented a plan to care for the workers and their families during the entrapment and rescue. Cameras were sent down the drill hole. Supplies and food were dropped down. They accommodated the families at the mine and even had prayer services for them while they waited for their loved one's rescue. Three international drilling companies were brought in, more than a dozen multi-national corporations and the NASA space agency got involved. Finally, in October, a hole was bored wide enough to lower rescue workers in a tube like container down to the miners. One by one over a period of 24 hours, all 33 miners were rescued. After the last trapped miner was winched to the surface, the rescuers held up a sign for the cameras that read "Mision cumplida Chile meaning "mission accomplished Chile." An audience of more than 1 billion viewers watched this moment on TV and the internet. The rescue cost 20 million dollars.

The miners were in relatively good health after spending 69 days underground. The president of Chile visited them in hospital and welcomed them to the presidential palace as special guests. Their story is told in a 2015 movie called "the 33."¹

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2010_Copiap%C3%B3_mining_accident

Now can you imagine being those men? For over 2 weeks you don't know if you're going to live or die. You don't know if anyone is really looking for you. You don't hear or see anything. You just know you are trapped beneath the earth. The only way you will get out is if somebody from above figures out a way to dig through the rubble or drill through the rock before you starve or suffocate.

Yet though none of us have been stuck underground for 69 days in a mine, we all need rescue. We may need rescue from a difficult situation. We may need rescue from some lie we've believed for decades that continues to disrupt our family. We may need rescue from some addiction that wreaks havoc in our lives or the lives of our loved ones. We certainly need rescue from the evil in our own hearts and the sins which separate us from God. We also need rescue from the devil. He wages war against God's people. He constantly seeks opportunities to bring us down, trip us up or keep us in his clutches.

But who will rescue us? Just like the Chilean miners, we cannot rescue ourselves from these dilemmas. We cannot cleanse our hearts, or make things right with God on our own. Nor can we overpower the devil in our own strength. We need a rescuer. Today, we are going to discover a rescuer who has delivered, is delivering and will deliver us.

All this will come from the Gospel writer Matthew's account of Jesus' life. We have seen the opposition He faced from the Pharisees. Remember the Pharisees? They were the religious leaders of the people kind of like pastors today. They did not know what to make of Jesus. They are at first curious. They hear things that make some wonder and others mad. They begin to oppose Jesus. Back in Matthew 9:32-35, Jesus heals a demon oppressed man. Then in verse 35, they conclude that Jesus casts out demons by the prince of demons.

In chapter 12, the Pharisees question Jesus about his disciples not respecting the Sabbath because they plucked grain from the grain fields. Jesus responds that He is Lord over the Sabbath. Then they see a man with a withered hand in the synagogue. They want to use him as a test case to trap Jesus into doing work on the Sabbath. So they ask if it is lawful to heal on the Sabbath. Jesus points out the inconsistency of their practice. But then he goes on to heal the man's hand.

Jesus knows about this increasing opposition. So he withdraws. Yet he continues to minister through healing. Matthew sees this as a fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecy about the Servant of the Lord who would come to save

His bruised and flickering people. Now we reach another confrontation with the Pharisees where Jesus will not let the charge they whisper go unchallenged.

I pray that God might use this text to further reveal Jesus, encourage us with His ongoing work on our behalf and move us to respond to Him.

Matthew 12:22-37 (ESV)

(P. 687 in the Bibles in front of you – bottom right corner).

²² Then a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute was brought to him, and he healed him, so that the man spoke and saw. ²³ And all the people were amazed, and said, "Can this be the Son of David?" ²⁴ But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons." ²⁵ Knowing their thoughts, he said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. ²⁶ And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? ²⁷ And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. ²⁸ But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. ²⁹ Or how can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house. ³⁰ Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. ³¹ Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. ³² And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

³³ "Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. ³⁴ You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. ³⁵ The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. ³⁶ I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, ³⁷ for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

The Event - A blind and mute demon-possessed man is brought to Jesus. Matthew implies that the blindness and inability to speak result from the demon's oppression. Matthew states in a matter of fact that Jesus healed the man. He suddenly can see and speak. I wonder what he said? I wonder if he had to learn how to talk? Someone who had limitations in 2 out of the 5 sense is suddenly restored in those areas. This is a great gift to the man individually.

It also serves as a great sign to the people who marvel at this. Matthew states "And all the people were amazed." the only time he uses "amazed" in his gospel. They had no category for a Messiah who healed. They expected a conquering and ruling Messiah who would take power and free the nation from the Romans and corruption. Could this be the *Son of David* was a phrase applied to the Messiah or Deliverer for whom the people longed. But now they see this one who does this wondrous work.

The charge But the Pharisees will not consider Jesus as possible Messiah. They conclude something radically different. "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons that this man casts out demons." Notice, they don't deny that

the demon oppressed man is now free. They don't try to disprove the event. They seek to reinterpret it to their conclusions. So they charge that **Jesus drives out demons by the power of the devil.**

Beelzebul means master of the house and came to be associated with the prince of demons or the devil. The Pharisees were most likely very sincere in their motivation. They see themselves as guardians of the people and God's law. They hear the people wonder if Jesus was Messiah. They have determined He is not or cannot be. Therefore, they have to come up with alternative explanation.

This charge would stick with Jesus through his ministry. It would circulate through the Jewish community for years after Jesus' resurrection. They thought they had a pretty good case. They believed that sorcery or using the dark powers to accomplish wondrous things came from Egypt. Jesus spent time in Egypt when He was a young boy. Therefore, he must have learned the magic arts there. Now he was practicing them in front of the people. So yes Jesus did wonders. But they charge him with doing them by the power of the devil. The Pharisees sincerely believe that they act on God's behalf. But they are sincerely wrong.

Jesus responds. **He exposes the faulty reasoning of the charge and clarifies the source of His power.** Matthew tells us that Jesus knew their thoughts. So it seems they weren't shouting this charge to the crowds. The Pharisees often spoke among themselves or to smaller groups of people to counter Jesus. They tried to do it far enough from him so He couldn't answer back.

But Jesus knew their thoughts. So He speaks up and points out the logical flaw in their argument. Why would Satan tear his own work down? Satan is the accuser, destroyer and enemy. He wants to oppress as many people as possible. He loves to gain power over people through terror, misery and enslavement. So why would Satan give Jesus the power to undo his own work? This blind and mute man was well oppressed. Why let him go? Such an action would be self-defeating like a nation suffering civil war or a family at war within or a soccer player who shoots the ball into his own net. Satan is not in it to lose. He wants to win. He wants Jesus to submit to him. He's always wanted to be greater than God.

"Besides," Jesus goes on. "You Pharisees approve of your own sons trying to cast out demons. If I cast out demons by the devil's power, then what power do your own exorcists use or attempt to use? It doesn't make sense Pharisees. If I am not using Satan's power, there's only one other power that could deal with demons. God. The Spirit of God." So

verse 28 – “But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.” So Jesus defeats their charge by pointing out it’s flawed reasoning and identifying the real source of his power.

But He doesn’t stop there. **He unveils something bigger that has happened.** Verse 29 – “Or how can someone enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed, he may plunder his house.” Imagine a wealthy gangster sits outside his house. He is muscular, well-armed and well-protected. His house is full of treasures that he has accumulated over years of crime. You cannot walk by the gangster sitting on his front porch and help yourself to his treasures. You first have to deal with the gangster. You have to tie him up in a way that though he may see you, he cannot stop you from taking his treasures.

Now who is the strong man? It’s the devil or Satan. His goods or treasures are people he oppresses and controls. So what would prove that the devil has been bound or tied up in some way? If someone came along and could free people under the devils’ control, they would have greater strength than the devil.

What has Jesus just done? He’s released a man from the devil’s oppression. So think about the implications. This occurred before the cross. Jesus had in some way already bound the devil. This likely happened at the temptation back in Matthew 3 where Jesus resisted the devil. Not only was this a great personal victory for Jesus but it was a great cosmic victory. Jesus resisted and overcame the devil’s temptations. So the devil had to flee. Ever since that time, Jesus frees people from the devil’s hold.

This is the best news in this passage today my friends. Jesus already inflicted a defeat on Satan at the temptation. Jesus built on that defeat by releasing people from the tyrant’s grasp. Jesus continued this rescuing work through the rest of His ministry. Then Jesus struck a deep blow to Satan through the cross. Satan may have thought he had won. But Jesus struck a death blow against Satan. He’s already lost the war. He just continues to battle until the end.

If Jesus could rescue people from the devil’s oppression then, He continues to do that today. He rescues you and me from the devil’s deceptions and lies. He rescues us from the devil’s schemes. He reaches out to save us from the devil’s traps. He has bound this strong man. He continues to go into the strong man’s house to plunder some piece of control the devil has over us or our family or our world. The text on the front page of your bulletin describes this work. God speaks and talks of his rescuing work. Isaiah 49:25 – “For even the captives of the mighty shall be taken, and the prey of the tyrant be rescued, for I will contend with those who contend with you, and I will save your children.” Jesus is

on our side continuing the fight with the devil. So Jesus answers the Pharisee's charge. "No, I am not doing this by the power of the devil. I have bound the devil and I'm advancing God's kingdom into his territory."

But Jesus does not stop there. **He uncovers the dangerous source of their charge.** (12:30-37). The Pharisees thought their comment exposed Jesus. But it exposed them. Jesus draws this out by first declaring – "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters." There is no middle ground when it comes to Jesus. There aren't 3 groups – one for Jesus; one neutral about Jesus and one group against Jesus. Neutrality about Jesus is a choice against Him. So if you are sitting on the fence about Jesus, you currently remain against Him.

Then Jesus unmasks the serious consequences of the Pharisees words. Verse 31 and 32. Therefore, I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man (Jesus) will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come." Where did this come from? Is Jesus saying there is an unforgivable sin? Yes. He brings this up because of the Pharisee's charge.

This unforgivable sin has caused many a Christian to fret and doubt. They wonder if perhaps they have committed this sin and are beyond redemption. I had a relative who was convinced that in a moment of anger they had spoken against God in this way. So they concluded they could not be forgiven and lived with years of despondency. But if you are a Christian and you are concerned about whether or not you have committed this sin, you haven't committed it. This blasphemy describes a hardened, steadfast, resolved anti-God stance that credits the devil with Jesus' power for ministry. **The unforgivable sin is a specific, active and final choice to declare the person and work of Jesus as being demonic in origin.**

It's one thing to speak against Jesus out of ignorance. People use Christ's name in vain or as a curse. But some come to Christ and are forgiven. The Apostle Paul used to curse Christ and Christians. He hunted them down for arrest and believed they were worthy of death. But then he met Christ and was forgiven. So speaking against Christ out of ignorance is not an unforgivable sin.

But to conclude that the work of God is actually the work of the devil will not be forgiven. That's what these Pharisees have done. If they persisted in this to the end of their lives, they would not be forgiven.

But how can Jesus make this charge? The Pharisee's didn't say anything about the Holy Spirit. Jesus forces them to evaluate their own heart. So verse 33 – "Either make the tree good and its fruit good or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit." Jesus asks the Pharisees to judge him by His fruit. Is he producing good fruit or bad fruit? Good trees bear good fruit. Bad trees bear bad fruit. He has just done the good work of releasing a man from demon oppression. So doesn't that reveal that Jesus is good?

But Jesus goes on to get to the literal heart of the matter. "You brood of vipers." A brood of vipers was the dozen or more small dangerous snakes that emerge at birth from the mother snake. Vipers attacked their prey with subtle and sly methods. You don't see snakes charge across a field with a roar. They silently approach and try to wrap up their victims before the victim knows what's happening. The Pharisees attempted to hide their own blasphemy by accusing Jesus of it.

But Jesus reveals the real problem. Their hearts are evil. "How can you speak good, when your hearts are evil. For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks." We know the state of our hearts when we monitor our speech in unguarded moments. When we're off duty or away from the boss or out of earshot of that person or whisper under our breath, we discover what's in our hearts. Jesus points out that the overflow of our hearts spills out in our speech, or texts, or posts.

Samantha Carr describes the will in human hearts. Samantha Carr is a mother of 8 and author of series Christian Biographies for Young Readers. She has recently written a first person account of Eve sitting at the grave of her son Abel and reflecting on how it all came to this.

She writes from Eve's perspective what life was like after God banished them from the garden.

"Outside of the Garden, the unmistakable signs of the death penalty have become increasingly obvious, as our bodies are now subject to illness, injury and decay. Even worse has been the decay of our hearts and minds and the realization that we no longer need an external source of temptation to sin against God. The desire to do evil has become part of us, while faith, goodness and love are no longer natural responses. They require a struggle." Evil is their hearts is what the Pharisees' revealed in their words. And our words and actions can sometimes reveal the evil in our hearts.

So we may try to claim that we were just joking. Or we may try to play down the sharpness of our words. Or we may try to excuse ourselves as just having a bad day. But words can reveal hearts. Words will be used on Judgment

Day. What did we say especially about Christ? Did we glorify Him with our words? Did we never mention Him? Did we use Him as a curse or mock His Word or His church?

There will be no turning back from this encounter. For the rest of this Gospel, Matthew shows us the ongoing battle and opposition Jesus endured from the religious leaders who rejected Him. This will culminate in their schemes around His arrest, trial and ultimate crucifixion. But for us today, we must pause to consider how we will respond to Jesus and His Word for us.

Perhaps we can all start by **Examining unguarded words to determine heart status towards Jesus.** What have you been saying lately about Jesus or God? Have you been talking about Him as your friend? Or have you expressed suspicion or wonder if He really is good? Do you think that He's out to spoil your fun more than bring you hope, purpose and life? If you're talk about Jesus has not been good, maybe you need to set aside some significant time today or in the next few days to reconnect with Him through your Bible and prayer.

Upon examining our words, some of us may discover that we have never actually received Jesus as Savior and Lord of our lives. We've never seen Him as God the Son. Maybe we've resisted His rescue attempts our whole lives. We've pushed Him away because we're sure we can rescue ourselves. Or like the religious leaders, we may refuse to locate evil in ourselves; in our hearts.

We need to **Receive Jesus' rescue.** We all need rescue – from the evil in our hearts, from death and from the devil. Jesus has bound the strongman. He wants to reclaim you from Satan's house. He's sent down the rescue pod to pull you up. Will you accept His rescue?

Some of us need to **Rejoice in the rescue of Jesus from the tyrant.** Jesus rescues us from the control, influence and oppression by Satan. We have been rescued from the roaring lion of the devil. He no longer rules us or has a hold upon us. He cannot prevent us from eternal life and forgiveness.

But there are still tough realities in my life; there are still problems. There are still times when bad stuff happens. So what is going on and how do we deal with this? What might be going on? The devil still roars. He still strikes. Though the devil has been bound and defeated, in some sense He is not completely bound. He is still allowed to do His work. We're commanded to resist him. **Resist the tyrant's continuing roars.** Ephesians 6:11 – Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and

blood but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. 1 Peter 5:8-9 - Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in the faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. James 4:7 – Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Ephesians 4:26-27 – Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger and give no opportunity to the devil.

Or maybe we need to **Adjust unrealistic expectations of a problem free life.** Maybe we believed that Jesus rescue of us from Satan means we should have no more struggles or suffering in life. But nowhere does Scripture promise an easy life for the Christian. We are called to persevere in the faith unto death if necessary. We must keep an eternal perspective on our sufferings. Remember 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 – “So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparisons, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.” So we keep going, knowing our sufferings are not meaningless. We continue to trust the Lord’s provision and strength to travel through them.

Or maybe we need to **Rediscover wonder at Jesus’ rescuing work.** We were lost in sin and headed for Hell. It cost Jesus everything to rescue us. It wasn’t like Jesus happened to come upon us while traveling on the road and gave up 5 minutes of time to drop us off at the next bus station. He had to leave the glories of heaven and condescend to become a human who was obedient unto death on a cross. He spent 33 years of time on earth to save us. And it was not only like he dove into a lake and pulled us out before we drowned. He dove into the lake and got us out and then drowned himself. Or he stepped out from the crowd watching our journey to the cross and said, “I’ll take his place.” One of the best ways to deal with anger over life or doubt about Jesus love for you is to spend time pondering Jesus on the cross. John Newton believed this was the key to the Christian life – to keep focused on Christ. He writes “If I may speak my own experience, I find that to keep my eye simply upon Christ as my peace and my life is by far the hardest part of my calling.” Yet so many other things compete for our peace and life. We get distracted by them until we come

to the end of our rope. But Jesus' rope has no end. So we can let go of our own and hang onto his and rediscover the joy and peace that is found in Him no matter what we're going through in life today.

We were once like the 33 miners trapped below the surface. Like them, we too have a rescuer. But He spent a lot more than 20 million dollars to rescue us. He gave up His own priceless life so we could have life with Him.