

Kingdoms Clashing (Matthew 12:15-37)

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Date: 03 October 2021

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[0 : 00] Okay, so Matthew chapter 12, verse 15 to 37. I'm reading from the NLV version. Aware of this, Jesus withdrew from that place.

A large crowd followed him, and he healed all who were ill. He warned them not to tell others about him. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah.

Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love and whom I delight. I will put my spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations.

He will not quarrel or cry out. No one will hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he has brought justice through to victory.

In his name the nations will put their hope. Then they brought him to a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see.

[1 : 04] All the people were astonished and said, Could this be the son of David? But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, It is only Beezable, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons.

Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand.

If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? And if I drive out demons by Beezable, by whom do your people drive them out?

So then they will be your judges. But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man?

Then he can plunder his house. Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. And so I tell you, every kind of sin and slander can be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.

[2 : 19] Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

Make a tree good, and its fruit will be good. Or make a tree bad, and its fruit will be bad. For a tree is recognized by its fruit. You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good?

For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him.

But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.

This is the reading of God's Word. Thank you, Ian. And yeah, let's welcome Pastor Sam here to share about the word today.

[3 : 30] Welcome, Sam. Thanks, Isaac. It's lovely to be able to join you again. This is the third time I've preached, and this is the second time on Zoom. And it's such a shame, because I feel like after three times, I probably would have got to know some of you a little bit.

But I do look forward to sometime soon meeting in person. But let's just pray as we come to God's Word. Heavenly Father, we give you thanks that we can still partake of your Word and be challenged and encouraged by it.

Lord God, please show us your beauty and your goodness and your justice, that we may be attracted to it to love you. And give us a warning that we would never blaspheme against you, Lord God, that we would never speak what is evil against you.

Lord, so please do teach us through your Word, we pray now in Jesus' name. Amen. All right. I would like everyone to pick some teams.

All right. So I'm going to throw out a few teams, and I want you guys to let me know which side you're on. So jump in the chat. Are you guys team PC or console?

[4 : 45] Team PC or console? PCs are taking it. I am PC as well. Way better gaming experience.

All right. This one might be a little bit odd. Are you team Jacob or team Edward? I have no stakes in this one.

I have not watched Twilight, but I think I'm team Jacob. He's the werewolf, isn't he? I'm team Jacob.

What about team Android or team Apple?

Apple. I thought there'd be too many students, and they couldn't afford apples. It's pretty even. It's pretty even. Now, you might not want to vote for this one, but are you team national or team labor? Are you team left or team right? Oh, we're going for it. You 100% don't have to vote for this one if you don't want. Oh, we're not worried at all.

[5 : 52] We're given our political opinions here and now. We like choosing teams. We like choosing sides. We're probably fairly committed to some of those choices we've made, whether it's a political party, our favorite way to game, our favorite game we play, the types of phones we buy.

We kind of pick a team. We stay in that lane. We're committed to that. We're willing to argue this is the best way to go. As we come to the passage today, we're actually challenged to pick a team. We're challenged to pick between team Jesus or team Satan, what the Bible would call kingdoms. So Jesus' kingdom, do you want to be on his team? Satan's kingdom, do you want to be on his team?

Now, that's quite a stark choice we have to make there, isn't it? Team Jesus or team Satan. And you might think, oh, is there a little bit in between? Do I have to pick? But a verse that really stood out to me is verse 30, where Jesus said, whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.

So you can be with or against Jesus. That's the two options, team Jesus or team Satan. And that's quite a challenging message, that in this cosmic clashing of kingdoms between good and evil, you have to pick a team.

[7 : 11] You have to pick a team. So which team are you on? Are you on team Jesus? Are you in his kingdom? And as this passage shows us, it begins with really the beauty of the kingdom of Jesus and why you truly would want to be on team Jesus, in Jesus' kingdom.

I just want you to see this from verses 15 to 21. This really not invites us in terms of the words it uses, but the way it describes Jesus and his kingdom. You just want to be welcomed.

You want to come to this kingdom. So verses 15 to 21, to begin with, we have this kind of slightly strange tactical retreat there in verse 15 and 16. And this sets the scene for Matthew's quotation there of Isaiah in the Old Testament.

So in verse 14, remember, the Pharisees have just begun plotting to kill Jesus, to take him out. And so Jesus, he withdraws from that conflict. But people are still following him, and he is still healing people.

So while he's healing people, the Pharisees are trying to destroy and kill. And really, this is where we begin to see the two kingdoms, Jesus' kingdom going to heal, Satan's kingdom and the Pharisees going to kill.

[8 : 30] But surprisingly, when Jesus heals people, he tells them to be quiet. He says orders there in verse 16. So it's a very strong word. Don't tell anybody about me.

I'm retreating. I'm backing up. And this is a little bit confusing behavior. Jesus is attacked. He retreats. He's popular. He wants people to keep quiet. So don't invite your friends.

Don't take a selfie with me. Keep me on the down low. And he does this, I think, because a conflict was building. The clashing of kingdoms was going to happen in his death and resurrection.

But now wasn't the time for him to go and die and rise again victorious. So he's just waiting. But more than that, Matthew wants to show us that this is the type of Jesus, the type of kingdom that we should expect if we've been reading our Old Testament well.

We should expect Jesus to be quiet and a suffering servant. And so that's why Matthew, that's the point Matthew makes in verse 17. That's why he quotes from the prophet Isaiah.

[9 : 33] He's saying this behavior from Jesus is a little bit odd, but this is who he is. This is what he is like. And so we're going to see, I guess, what we should expect Jesus to be like, what he is like.

And there in verse 18, we see Jesus, he's spirit appointed in his ministry and service. So he has been sent by God. He's loved.

He's got the spirit upon him. He is the representative of God's kingdom. He's the one that God sent to bring his kingdom. And as he does that, he brings with him gentleness and justice.

And it's a really wonderful combination, gentleness and justice. So Jesus' mission there was to proclaim and then to bring justice. And by this, I think we should understand that Jesus was by justice, he was going to make all things right.

So this means that he was going to both reward the righteous for their good living in a fair, just way, and that he was also going to punish the wicked for what they had done wrong in a fair and just way.

[10:39] We could also think of justice as in that he was going to lift up the lowly. Those who are humble, he was going to lift up. But those who are proud, he would push down. And then we can also think of Jesus' justice in that eventually he was going to remove all sin and its effects.

And he was going to bring justice and perfection to his creation. And then in verse 18 there, Jesus, he first proclaims this justice. And I think this proclamation, this refers really to his earthly life.

So in Jesus' earthly life and death, he healed the sick. He fed the needy. He preached to the lowly and lifted them up. He, on his earthly ministry, he died to pray for sins and received upon himself the punishment we deserved.

He was here bringing justice, proclaiming, look, it's not fully here now, but look ahead. This is coming, complete removal of sin and all its effects.

His sickness is going to be no more. Poverty will be eliminated. The lowly are going to be lifted up. The guilty are going to be punished. Those who have faith will be forgiven and made righteous. So as Jesus goes about his earthly ministry, it's like we're looking through a crack in the fence at what the future is going to look like, what the other side of this life is going to look like.

[12:03] I don't know if you remember kicking a ball over the fence when you were a kid and you kind of peek through the crack to try and find it, to try locate the ball before you jumped over. Well, when Jesus came and did these wonderful ministries, it's like we're looking through a crack.

We're looking through a crack at the justice of God and how he was going to make all things right. And Jesus proclaims that in his life. And so we can, as we come to Jesus, we come to a kingdom where every scale is going to be fairly weighed.

Every injustice is going to be done away with and punished. And every overlooked soul is going to be lifted up and put in its proper place of honor. The justice of Jesus.

And that's the justice he brings. But wonderfully, he also brings with him gentleness. That's verses 19 and 18. We see that in Jesus' manner, he is quiet, he is gentle, and therefore he's welcoming.

And so from these verses, you get the idea that you would love to come and meet Jesus. Anyone would love to come and meet Jesus, no matter how shy they were, no matter how anxious they were, they would love to come and meet Jesus.

[13:17] Back then, but also here today by his spirit. And so we get a look at Jesus' gentleness. So Jesus, he's promised much with his justice.

And the wonderful thing is that for Jesus to bring about his justice, he's not going to ride roughshod over people to get things done. We have had a hint already that he's going to be gentle.

He's called a servant. But then it's made all the clearer there in verse 22, which shows us his kindness and his compassion. This is the Jesus we love and worship. It says, A bruised reed, he will not break.

A smoldering wick he will not quench until he brings justice to victory. So those are some weird images for us. But reeds were used just like a quill or sometimes they were made into a flute to play music on.

Or you'd get a quill and it'd be a measuring rod. But the thing about these is that they were really easy to find and they were easy to bruise. And so that meant that if you ever had one and it broke, you'd just chuck it away.

[14:20] There's hundreds and thousands of them down by the river and marshes. So you just went and got a new one, got rid of the old one, went and got a new one. A smoldering wick was a similar idea.

It was probably a piece of flax, which was cheap or easy to find. And so if your light started flickering or wasn't very good, or if it got wet, the wick of flax did and was kind of snuffing out and wasn't doing very, very well, you'd just kind of get rid of it and just go and get a new one.

Easy to replace. So both these things are easily broken and really easy to replace. They're both kind of insignificant and plentiful. And the modern day equivalent, I think would be like the hundreds and thousands of plastic containers my wife has kept in our pantry just in case we want to use them.

At some stage, you get them from your favorite takeaway place. They go in the cupboard. I just want to chuck them out. I don't care about them. And for her, they're precious. She's going to hold on to them. So Jesus, he holds on to things that are broken easily.

He holds on to things that seem insignificant. There's tons of them. They're not particularly important. He doesn't crush them. He doesn't discourage them.

[15:33] He's willing to kind of mend up that which is broken. He's gentle and he's kind. And sometimes it's possible and it's easier to get things done if you just ride roughshod over people, particularly over little people, particularly over people who can be damaged quite easily.

The Pharisees, they're a terrible example. So they just plan to kill Jesus. They can't kind of work with him. They can't find agreement with him. So it's going to take him out.

And in the next few verses, we see they make these accusations. But Jesus, when he's facing them, he doesn't go to kill. He doesn't look for an argument, but he quietly and kindly continues in his mission to bring justice and to show kindness and gentleness.

An example that came to the mind of the opposite of Jesus' gentleness in getting things done came from a biography of Steve Jobs. So he's a hugely successful man.

By all accounts, he was a good father and a husband and he built this huge kingdom of Apple. But I want you to listen to what one of his employees said about his management style.

[16:50] This is from a lady called Joanna Hoffman, who was part of Apple from the early years. And she twice won a satirical award given to the person who did the best job of standing up to Jobs.

So this is a lady who actually could stand up to someone with a lot of charisma. But here's what she said about Jobs. He had an uncanny capacity to know exactly what your weak point is.

Know what will make you feel small to make you cringe. It's a common trait in people who are charismatic and know how to manipulate people. Knowing that he can crush you makes you feel weakened and eager for his approval.

So then he can evaluate you and put you on a pedestal and own you. That is what lots of successful, strong-willed people who get things done, lots of them are like that.

But not Jesus. He doesn't make you feel small and helpless. He won't hunt you out, hunt out your weaknesses and try and manipulate them.

[18:01] He doesn't give up on people when they're difficult. He doesn't snuff out flickers of hope and light in your life. He doesn't throw away the broken. He's quiet.

He's kind. He's full of compassion. He's willing to go and die in your place, in my place, despite our brokenness. This is Jesus.

This is his kingdom, gentleness, mixed with justice. This is who we should all side with. This is team Jesus. This is the kingdom of Jesus.

It's wonderful. It's inviting. Would you join this kingdom? But as we go on to see, this kingdom actually clashes with the kingdom of Satan and that's what we have in verses 22 to 37.

And I'm sure many of you are wondering what the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is and we'll get there. But first, would you just need to pay attention to what's the context and what's going on?

[18:59] Sometimes you've maybe thought about blasphemy of the Holy Spirit as just a phrase or one idea, but not actually seeing what's going on. Why did Jesus say that? Who did he say it to? And it's good to see it within this context of clashing kingdoms.

So first, we see that once again, it's a context of healing and verses 22 to 29. And through this, we do see, we do realize that this isn't just about a little healing, but this is Jesus versus Satan.

This is good versus evil. This is kingdoms, spiritual kingdoms clashing. So we're told very little about the man, that he was blind and mute, but we are told it was because of the oppression of a demon, but that he was healed completely and fully by Jesus.

And so when Jesus goes and heals this demon, I mean, heals this blind and mute man, he's actually dealing with evil. He's dealing with the kingdom of darkness and with this demon.

We're told that the crowd were on the right track. So they ask a good question. Is this the son of David? Is this the promised king? Is this the king of the kingdom?

[20 : 06] So they're really heading in the right direction. They're seeing Jesus for who he is. But then there's quite the contrast and things take a really big turn in verse 24 with the Pharisees who see the healing.

And instead of saying, oh man, is this God's promised savior coming? Instead of saying this, they say, hey, Jesus is actually on Satan's team. So Beelzebub there means the head of the house. So the head of the demonic house and that the Pharisees are saying, you're actually working for the prince of demons. They say, Jesus is working for him. And this is, of course, is an outrageous and ridiculous statement.

The problem is though, that the Pharisees just couldn't deny Jesus' power. Right? They could not deny his wonderful ministry. It was unquestionable. The crowds were seeing it.

So instead, they just throw shade on him. They question the source of his power. They can't discredit his power. They can't deny his power. So they discredit him and they lie about him.

[21 : 12] But they're really grasping at straws. And so Jesus picks their lies apart with, I guess, logic and with a few good stories in verse 25 to 29.

A few good parables. First, he says, if I'm doing this by Satan, then Satan is working against himself. A demon has been hurting this man and I, another demon, come and, you know, work against, work at odds with my own people.

So he says, if there's in-house fighting, then it's over for the kingdom of Satan. It can't stand. It's losing. It's maybe like a kid's soccer team when they're all running around in a big ball and one kid gets confused and kicks it in his own goal and starts celebrating and the rest of the team is dumbfounded.

Well, the Pharisees are trying to say that Jesus is like that kid. He came and kicked an old goal. He's on Satan's team, but he's scoring for the kingdom of God's team.

So Jesus says, this doesn't make sense that I would be fighting against my own side. He continues to pick apart their lies in verse 27. He says, if I'm casting out demons by the prince of demons, then what's going to happen when you guys cast out demons?

[22 : 23] Everyone will turn around and say, hey, aren't you on the side of the demons as well? Aren't you on the wrong side? So you're really shooting yourself in the foot here. And then Jesus, he offers the truthful alternative explanation, which is that the kingdom of God has come and it is clashing with the kingdom of Satan.

So look at 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. Jesus says, the kingdom of God in his ministry has broken into reality through the Holy Spirit.

The spirit was the power behind Jesus' ministry. It enabled his miracles and his healings and his exorcisms. And remember that it was placed on him to proclaim this justice to the world.

And he is exercising that power here in this hearing, here against this injustice. And so in Jesus, we see a tremendous power in his kingdom.

That's the point of verse 29. The strong man is Satan and Jesus is able to come in and tie him up and disable him. That's what happened in the healing of the man.

[23 : 39] Jesus, through the spirit, overpowered Satan and God's kingdom broke into that man's life. Kingdoms are clashing, but Jesus is winning. And it's worth stopping and realizing that the same spirit lives in each one of us as we battle against sin, against Satan and his lies.

The spirit, powerful spirit, lives and rests in us to help us as we go through lockdown, as we're discouraged. The spirit is there to help. And hopefully this adds a really new dimension to your life, that you're in a spiritual battle, that God and Satan are fighting it out over people's lives in your life. Jesus is going to win. You're on his side. You have his spirit. That actually can be quite challenging and encouraging that you're in this battle.

You're in this war and you're fighting with Jesus. So I encourage you to rely on the spirit's power, to know you're part of a bigger war. Trust in Jesus.

I call on the spirit to help. Without the spirit's help, it's like hiking without water or entering a battle without a weapon or putting a sticking plaster on a broken leg.

[25 : 05] You must have the power of God's spirit to help you battle sin and Satan. We rely on the spirit to overcome all sin in our life.

And that is what Jesus is doing. By the spirit, he is fighting the kingdom of Satan here. And now we come to the unforgivable sin there in verse 31.

Jesus, still speaking to the Pharisees, says, therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people. Before we get to blasphemy against the spirit, I just want you to know Jesus says, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven.

So there is tons of forgiveness to be had with Jesus. Everything can be forgiven except this one thing. There is a lot of forgiveness to be had.

God offers it to you if you turn and come to him. There is forgiveness to be had. But then Jesus goes on to say, but blasphemy against the spirit will not be forgiven.

[26 : 07] Blasphemy means to slander someone or to misuse their name or to speak evil against them. So blaspheming against the Holy Spirit in the context of this passage is what the Pharisees had just done.

So they consciously and willfully lied about the work of the spirit in defeating evil. So they saw what Jesus and the spirit did in healing this man and they said, that's not God, that's Satan.

More than them just kind of ignoring God, ignoring the spirit or more than them just kind of misunderstanding who Jesus is, misunderstanding the work of the spirit.

Instead, they look at it and directly call it evil. Remember the crowd, they were clued in. They thought, oh, I wonder who this is. So there's forgiveness for them.

They're not sure, but they're at least trying. They had a sense of what Jesus was trying to do. But the Pharisees, they knew their scriptures well. They knew the Old Testament passage that Matthew had quoted.

[27 : 13] But instead of embracing Jesus and his power and his justice and his gentleness and his authority, instead they look at it unable to deny it and call it evil.

Call it the work of Satan. They're calling good evil and the Holy Spirit's work Satan. And remember that the spirit, just for context and blaspheming the spirit, the spirit is what characterizes the kingdom of God, the new kingdom of God.

You know, once Jesus is resurrected at Pentecost, the spirit comes and the spirit was at work in Jesus' ministry. And so to deny and speak against that spirit and call it evil is to deny the very means that God is going to use as he brings the spirit at Pentecost, as he works through Jesus, you're denying the very means he has and is using to save you, to show you who he is.

And they were denying that. They were denying the person who could come and show God to them. So their lack of forgiveness is not because God's unwilling to forgive.

He sent his one and only son. He sent his spirit. He's more than willing to forgive. But instead, this state of unforgiveness is because those who practice deliberate self-deception, deliberately turning against the spirit and calling it evil, they're actually never, ever going to come to repentance.

[28 : 47] They'll look at what God's doing, they'll hear from the Holy Spirit, and they'll say that's evil. It's worse than nothing. It's actually evil.

And that will reveal something deep about their heart and entrenched opposition to God, not being able to deny his power, but instead calling him evil.

And also I think that Jesus can, what he teaches about speech further in our passage helps us understand this blaspheming against the Holy Spirit. It highlights that what we say is particularly significant because it reveals what's in our heart.

So from our heart comes our words, what we've stored in our heart. And what we've heard from the Pharisees is what's in their heart. There's no throwaway words before God.

They are saying we believe that the Spirit and Jesus are not just the ultimate good and not just what brings the kingdom. We believe that they are Satan, that they are evil, and it reveals a heart in complete opposition to God.

[29 : 58] And the problem for them and the Pharisees is that no matter what display of power Jesus showed, no matter what the Holy Spirit did, they would only attribute it to greater and greater displays of evil from Satan.

They would only be more keen to kill Jesus and take him out. The more popular he got, the greater things he did. So as we look at this, that blaspheming against the Holy Spirit is looking at the very work of God and truly believing that it's evil, that it's Satan, and it shows a very deep, deep hatred against God.

And so the question in this whole passage really that it's driving us to is where do we stand with Jesus? Where are our hearts with Jesus?

We can't be neutral. Kingdoms are clashing. We must pick a side, team Jesus or team Satan. And particularly this blaspheming against the Holy Spirit is here as a warning that we not lie in our hearts about Jesus, about what we have seen the Spirit do, about what we have heard about Jesus. This passage is addressing people who are hostile to Jesus and unbelieving of what they've read and heard and seen in him. And it's a warning.

[31 : 28] Don't reject, don't keep rejecting the prompting and work of the Holy Spirit in your life because you can come to a state where you will never return again to find forgiveness.

Instead, the more you see, the more hardened you will become. The more you reject the Spirit, the more you'll think it's really the work of Satan. you might like to think of it as when your eyes get adjusted to the dark and then the light gets flicked on and it's bright and horrible and you just want to close your eyes to go back to the dark.

Well, you can get to a point where you no longer want the light flicked on. It hurts too much and so you retreat further and further into the dark. my desire is that for anyone here, for any of your friends or family, that they would not continue denying but would turn and find forgiveness in Jesus.

That they would look at the kingdom of Jesus with its justness and its gentleness and say that is true, that is good, I want to be part of that kingdom.

So I plead with you to pray for repentance. that God might soften your heart and he will forgive you when you turn. I plead with you to turn your heart, stop fighting God and join his side.

[32 : 57] Now some of you might have friends and family who strongly reject Jesus. It might seem like every time you share the gospel with them they become more adverse to it.

And perhaps you're fearful that they have blasphemed the Holy Spirit. It is unlikely that they have unless they really think that you're on Satan's side and they probably deeply hate you.

You probably have family members that are more like, look, I'm fine that you're doing this God thing and it seems to be working for you but I don't want that. And I think it's wrong.

And I'll even argue with you quite heatedly. but if you want to do it, you can do it. That type of situation is not blaspheming the Holy Spirit. It hasn't got to the point where they will not return.

But more importantly, I probably remind you that we're not God. We don't know the state of people's hearts and this passage isn't here for us to kind of look at someone and give up on them and think they've reached a state of unforgiveness.

[34 : 07] They will never turn. We don't know that. We can only trust God and pray and evangelize and do all that we can in God's wisdom to see someone turn and follow Jesus.

So do keep trusting in God. Do keep serving him. Don't let this verse kind of discourage you and kind of give up on someone who you want to see saved. We can't place, we can't say the state of someone's heart.

Only God can do that. I think it's also important to address some people that this passage isn't talking to. I would hate for anyone to leave this Zoom service and think I'm in a state of unforgiveness.

This passage isn't addressing anyone who lacks faith. It's not addressing anyone who feels weighed down by repeated sins. It isn't someone who isn't quite sure if they're good enough or doesn't quite believe that Jesus would die for them.

If that's you, discouraged by sin or lacking assurance, do not commit this verse to memory. This is not speaking to you.

[35 : 20] If that's you, what you have is actually a very soft heart to God. It's very aware of your sin, very aware of, wow, that Jesus would die for you. Maybe just having doubts.

And to you, Jesus would come along with gentleness and come beside you and say, I love you. I'm here to forgive you. I'm here to walk beside you.

I'm here to give you my spirit that you may be encouraged and lifted up. Perhaps if you're fearful that this is you, then just reflect on the Pharisees here.

Do you look like one of these Pharisees wanting to murder Jesus, wanting to call his work, his church evil? My guess is that you're not. So don't be afraid you've committed the unforgivables and you've blasphemed the Holy Spirit.

Instead, turn again with your soft heart to Jesus. He'll forgive you. He'll mend you up in your brokenness. He won't cast you off. I'd encourage you to put this passage to the side and just remember that Jesus said, come to me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

[36 : 31] That's the Jesus you need to listen to if you're feeling burdened or broken. And may I just end with one final encouragement, to join and love Team Jesus, the kingdom of Jesus.

It is wonderful to be part of his kingdom, to know his spirit, and to take the good news of his gospel to others, knowing that God will call them. They will turn and repent.

It is very, very few that have the same hard-heartedness as the Pharisees. So please do be encouraged by being part of God's kingdom. Shall we pray now?

Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for the wonderful gentleness and justice of Jesus. I just pray for each one of us that we would find warmth near Jesus in his kingdom, full of thankfulness to him, full of hope for this justice we see here in Jesus coming fully when Jesus returns.

Lord God, encourage us with this each day we pray. Lord, I just ask that there be no one part of the wider church, Lord God, who is heading towards blaspheming against your spirit, who is looking at the church and thinking, ah, that actually this is evil.

[37 : 44] Or Lord, if there's anyone who's not sure, Lord God, or frustrated or anything, Lord God, we pray that they wouldn't head down a road of hard-heartedness to you, Lord God.

They wouldn't become cynical of you, Lord God, but they would see you at work in people. They would say, wow, God is good. God is gentle. God is just. I will repent and keep following him.

So please do sound this warning of the Pharisees and people's lives that they may turn in faith to you. We pray all these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.