

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

MATTHEW 11:16 - 12:50

President Abraham Lincoln once said, “You can please *some* of the people *all* of the time. You can please *all* of the people *some* of the time. But you can never please *all* of the people *all* of the time.” The conclusion is, “*Don’t try.*” The crowd is always fickle. Not even the Son of God could please everyone.

This is where Jesus leaves off in his discussion of John the Baptist...

Verse 16, “But to what shall I liken this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their companions, and saying: 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we mourned to you, and you did not lament.'”

Jesus compares His generation to fickle, spoiled school children.

There was no pleasing them. They neither dance nor mourn - though music was played for both. They couldn't make up their minds what they wanted.

He gets more exact in verse 18. “For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' "The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a gluttonous man and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' But wisdom is justified by her children.” Neither John nor Jesus pleased the Jews. *John and his men fasted...* and the Jews thought he was too austere.

Jesus and His men feasted... and they called him a drunkard and a glutton.

They weren't happy with *John and his mourning men* - nor *Jesus and His merry men*. The Jews complained John was too *aloof*, and Jesus was too much *a part*.

Notice this, not even God in the flesh could please people – *so why try?*

Hey, *are you a people pleaser?*

Ordinarily making people happy is a noble desire, but when your drive to make someone happy causes you to engage in destructive behavior - or to compromise a godly principle – *your desire to please has become a dreaded disease.*

Bill Cosby once said, "*I don't know the key to success, but the key to failure is trying to please everybody.*" Trying to satisfy the fickleness of people is a losing proposition. Rather than *please people*, our desire needs to be to *please God*.

Hey, if pleasing God is your goal, you'll make the right people happy in just the right ways. Remember, Jesus' one desire was always to please His Father.

Once I saw a cartoon of two politicians walking down the hall. One said to the other, "*I never met a fence I couldn't straddle.*" How fitting for an election year...

But that was also the attitude of the people who observed Jesus.

They saw miracle after miracle, but could never make up their mind. They were fence-straddlers. And Jesus has harsh words for them in the next few verses...

Verse 20 “Then He began to rebuke the cities in which most of His mighty works had been done, because they did not repent...”

The Greek word translated “rebuke” means “to taunt or chide, to rail at verbally.” It comes from a root word which means “to chop with your teeth.”

In other words, Jesus literally *chewed out* these cities.

“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida!

For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

Tyre and Sidon were Phoenician cities with Gentile populations.

In Matthew 15:21 we're told Jesus made a visit to these cities. He ministered in their community so they were without excuse. But Tyre and Sidon had not been nearly as exposed to Jesus and His miracles as had Chorazin and Bethsaida.

You've heard of the Bermuda Triangle? It's an area in the Caribbean Sea where strange phenomena and mysterious activity take place. Some people believe the Triangle is a hotbed for demonic activity – it's a site for the supernatural.

But there's another triangle of real estate known for the supernatural. No area on earth has seen more miracles per square mile than the area on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee – between the town of Chorazin and the two fishing villages, Capernaum and Bethsaida – 5 miles x 3 miles x 4 miles.

The region has been called “**The Evangelical Triangle.**”

Between 28 and 32 AD here's what people living in the Triangle witnessed...

Five loaves of bread and 2 minnows multiplied into a feast for 5000 families - blind men received sight – lame men walked – a girl was raised from the dead - a Man walked on top of the water - a violent storm was calmed by a Man's rebuke.

All manner of diseases were healed and demons were exorcised.

The people who saw these events were a privileged population.

Yet, though they were *impressed* they refused to *enlist*. They failed to follow Jesus and He had strong words for them... Verse 22, “But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you.”

Notice God judges cities as well as individuals. God not only holds people accountable, but He recognizes corporate identities. In Revelation 2-3 Jesus judges 7 churches. In Isaiah 13-24 He judges nations. Here He judges cities.

It's my belief that in this modern age He'll also judge corporations, and endowments, and political parties, and lobbying groups, and labor unions.

Jesus says in verse 23, “And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in

Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you."

When you recall fire from heaven incinerated Sodom, these are strong words.

Of the tri-cities in the Evangelical Triangle none was as privileged as Capernaum. Matthew 9:1 refers to Capernaum as Jesus' "own city."

Bethlehem was Jesus' birthplace. **Nazareth** was where He was raised.

But **Capernaum** was His chosen hometown. It was where Jesus headquartered His ministry. It was site of His greatest miracles. Indeed, it was "exalted to heaven."

The city of Sodom was notorious for its unbridled lust and sexual perversions.

Sodom was a *perverted place* - whereas, Capernaum was a *privileged place*.

"And with privilege comes responsibility." The more you've seen - the more you've received - the more you know - *the more accountable you are*.

Too many Christians have a woodpile of knowledge and a cold fireplace. They *learn it* - but never *live it*. This was Capernaum... Chorazin... and Bethsaida... as you can see today there's nothing left of all three. You don't want to be like them!

"At that time Jesus answered and said, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes.

Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight.”

The 1891 official basketball rule book contained 2 pages. The 1991 rule book had of 114 pages. The tendency in life is to go from *simplicity* to *complexity*.

But not so with Jesus, He loves to bring simplicity to life and theology.

And here’s why... to appreciate simplicity you have to be humble. Haughtiness adores complexity. Pride divides men into the *know-it-alls* and the *know-nothings*.

Whereas simplicity does just the opposite - it unites us by humbling us.

God deliberately packaged His truth in simplicity. It was a stroke of genius. For in doing so, God hid it from the haughty and He revealed it to the babes.

Verse 27 “All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.” It’s impossible to know God apart from Jesus. The door to God opens only after you come to Jesus and embrace Him as Lord and Savior. *And He invites you to come...*

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

On August 15, 1930, New York State Supreme Court Justice, Joseph Carter, spent the evening at a restaurant. He hailed a cab to go home, but Judge Carter was never seen or heard from again. What happened to Justice Carter?

We don't know. The case was never solved. But there was one clue...

When his wife returned to their apartment there was a check for a large sum of money made out to her, and signed by her husband. Along with the check was a short note. It read, "**I am very, very tired. Love, Joe.**" That's all we know.

Was it suicide - perhaps? Its obvious Joseph Carter had become emotionally exhausted. He was weighted down with life's demands and decided to give up.

If you're heart is heavy... if your spirit is tired – verses 28-30 are words of hope.

Jesus invites you to enjoy a *restful*, rather than a *stressful* life! He calls us to do three things... **come to Him – yoke with Him – learn of Him.**

Usually, a younger ox was harnessed to an older, stronger ox. The yoke was made in such a way that it distributed more of the weight onto the stronger ox.

Jesus is the lead ox. Submit to Him and the load falls on Him. Jesus carries the burden, and does the work. If you're in a *yoke that chokes* - the burden you carry didn't come from Jesus. He says, "**My yoke is easy and My burden is light.**"

Come - be reachable... **Yoke** - be agreeable... **Learn** - be teachable...

Chapter 12 “At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. And His disciples were hungry, and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat.

And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, "Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!" Jesus said His yoke was easy, and His burden was light. Yet the yoke of the Pharisees was *complicated - not easy*. Their burden was *heavy - not light*. The Pharisees interpreted the Law in such a way that it became impossible for the Jews to keep its commands.

A couple of years later at the council of Jerusalem, Peter will say to his fellow Jews in Acts 15:10, "why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?"

The Pharisees had laced up the Jews in a straightjacket of legalism. Doing, and keeping, and rules, and religion replaced relationship with God and simple faith.

And nowhere was this more apparent than in keeping the Sabbath Day holy. The Jewish Talmud has 24 chapters on how to observe the Sabbath.

God's command to "Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy" was a broad principle intended to be applied to each heart by the gentle touch of the Holy Spirit.

God designed the Sabbath as a day for us to rejoice, relax, and rejuvenate. The Sabbath was *a day of worship and play* to balance out *the week of work*.

Instead the Pharisees applied the Law with a heavy hand. They created all kinds of stipulations that defined “work.”

Most Jews looked forward to the end of the Sabbath Day so they could rest from its regulations.

What the Pharisees were doing in the fields on the Sabbath we don't know!

Their own codes prohibited them from being more than 3000 feet from their home on the Sabbath. But they so were so jealous of Jesus and so determined to trap Him they broke their own laws to spy on Jesus and His disciples.

When they saw the disciples grinding grain with their hands so they could eat the seed, they accused them of doing work – a clear violation of the Sabbath.

But Jesus saw it differently. Verse 3, “**But He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests?"**

Jesus makes a point the Pharisees hadn't considered. Often in God's will other issues are more important than a strict observance of the letter of the Law.

The Law said the sacred showbread exhibited in the Tabernacle could only be eaten by the priests. But when David's troops were hungry God allowed them to eat up. It was the only bread available. It saved David's men from starvation.

Jesus is saying *human need* takes precedent over *ritual*. *Compassion* is more important than *tradition*.

Here's another example. "Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless?" Labor was taboo on the Sabbath, but if priests didn't work who would open the temple?

The priest was like a pastor – he only worked one day a week – but it was the day of worship. His work made it possible for everyone else to worship.

This is why legalism is ludicrous. Often it creates a Catch 22 - a priest is forced to violate the Law or nobody else can keep it. A strict interpretation of the Law can get in the way of doing God's will, and keeping its broader requirements. When we seek to obey God we need to be flexible, open, and led by the Spirit.

"Yet I say to you that in this place there is One greater than the temple."

This must've stunned the Pharisees. This was shocking statement.

The Pharisees might excuse the priests for working on the Sabbath because they were *serving the Temple*, and thus, serving God. But Jesus claimed to be greater than the Temple. Thus *serving Jesus* was also serving God.

"But if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless." Jesus quotes from Hosea 6:6.

Sacrifice for sacrifice sake – ritual for ritual sake - is of no value to God. He has no appetite for dead animals. Priestly duties are of no particular beauty to Him. It's the attitude

behind the sacrifice - the meaning of the ritual – that makes it valuable.

What really matters to God is that we show mercy and convey His heart.

Verse 8 **“For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”**

Here’s the comment that raised their Pharisaical anger to the boiling point.

Jesus is greater than the Sabbath. Only He can rightly interpret Sabbath regulations - for He is the one who invented the Sabbath in the first place.

Verse 9 **“Now when He had departed from there, He went into their synagogue”**

On our tours to Israel we visit this very synagogue. It’s not far from the water. It was the hub of religious activity in the region – the synagogue at Capernaum.

“And behold, there was a man who had a withered hand. And they asked Him, saying, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” - that they might accuse Him.

Mark's Gospel implies the man was planted in the Synagogue to test Jesus.

The Pharisees interpreting healing as work – so to heal on the Sabbath was a violation. The Law allowed you to treat a wound to stop the bleeding - and keep a person’s condition from worsening - but you could do nothing to actually improve their condition or directly hasten the healing. They had to wait until sundown.

“Then He said to them, “What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out?”

Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep?
Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.”

God *embedded* in the Law *exceptions to the Law*. For example, you could save a neighbor’s livestock. Thus, if helping a cow is allowable, why not healing a man?

Jesus thought the application was obvious. But it wasn't to the Pharisees.

“Then He said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.”

My aunt, my dad’s sister, spent her life in a wheelchair. She was crippled.

Ann was the only sibling born in the hospital. The family always believed she was dropped by a nurse and injured. Among her handicaps was a withered hand.

It was *curled up* and *narled up* into a ball. She held it against her chest. Its fingers were frozen and rigid. It served her more like a club than a hand.

Likewise this man in the synagogue had the same condition – a withered hand.

Yet Jesus gives him an impossible command. He says, “Stretch out your hand.”

“Stretch out my hand? How? Its muscles are paralyzed.”
Apparently none of these doubts entered his mind. He didn't consider the physical impossibilities.

Instead, he decided to obey. And in the moment the message exited the brain and headed along the nerves

toward his hand, God's healing power touched this man's body. His hand was instantly healed. His fingers worked for the first time.

This is how God works with us. He issues seemingly impossible commands.

He asks us to do what we've never done... **speak to a crowd - love a homeless man - share our faith - stretch out a withered hand...** suddenly we have a choice.

We can focus on the impossibility, and remain incapacitated, or we can obey.

And in the moment we choose to obey, the Lord sends us His strength – or courage - or does a healing - and instantly the *impossible* becomes *possible*.

Do you have a withered part? A dream, a relationship, a talent, an ambition – it's frozen, paralyzed? Stretch it out at Jesus command and it will be healed.

Notice, **“And he stretched it out, and it was restored as whole as the other.”**

Verse 14 **“Then the Pharisees went out and plotted against Him, how they might destroy Him.”** Jesus works miracles. The Pharisees are full of malice.

How tragic, *the blindness of legalism.*

“But when Jesus knew it, He withdrew from there. And great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them all.” He made time to heal everyone.

“Yet He warned them not to make Him known, that it might

be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: "Behold, My Servant whom I have chosen, My Beloved in whom My soul is well pleased! I will put My Spirit upon Him, and He will declare justice to the Gentiles." Matthew quotes Isaiah 42:1-4.

Jesus' *rejection by the Jews and reception by the Gentiles* was predicted.

Verse 19 continues the quote from Isaiah. "He will not quarrel nor cry out, nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets." In other words, it's not Jesus' style to force Himself on anyone. He avoids ugly confrontations as much as possible.

When He heard the Pharisees wanted to kill Him He could've attacked and fought back. And trust me, He would've won. Instead, Jesus simply withdrew and ministered to the people who were willing to receive His ministry. Jesus was no bully. He didn't bulldoze over people. He came in kindness and gentleness.

It was also said of Jesus, "A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench, till He sends forth justice to victory; and in His name Gentiles will trust." Isaiah speaks of how Jesus handles hurting, bruised people. It's still His approach. "A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench."

There are *bruised reeds* and *smoking flax* here tonight. Some of you have been beaten down by the world. You're dragging and bent over. You've forgotten how to stand tall. Some of you are just about burned out. The world has doused

your fire and passion. Your flame has almost fizzled.

Hey, Jesus doesn't finish the job. His goal is not to put down, but pick up.

He takes the last remaining embers and fans the flame. He puts a splint around the bend in reed until it mends. He brings hope and healing and encouragement.

He cares for us. As Hosea says, He "draws us with bands of love."

Verse 22 "Then one was brought to Him who was demon-possessed, blind and mute; and He healed him, so that the blind and mute man both spoke and saw."

Here's another example where *physical sickness* was caused by *demonic activity*. Obviously, not all sickness is caused by a demon. But it happens.

"And all the multitudes were amazed and said, "Could this be the Son of David?" "Son of David" was a title for Messiah - God's Deliverer of Israel.

"Now when the Pharisees heard it they said, "This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons."

"Beelzebub" or "Lord of the flies" had become another name for Satan.

Jesus' critics couldn't deny the reality of His miracles. They were done in the public square for all to see. So they try to refute their source. The Pharisees claimed Jesus was casting out demons by the power of the devil.

Verse 25 “But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them: “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?” Their argument lacked logic.

Why would Satan oppose his own forces? The devil isn’t dumb. We wish his henchmen were not so united and in sync. Their efforts wouldn’t be as effective.

Jesus ask the Jews a question, “And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges.”

There were Jewish exorcists who also cast out demons.

Jesus is calling for consistency. If they say His power comes from the devil, then what about the Jews who also exorcise demons. Are they of the devil?

“But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house.”

When Jesus cast out a demon He was exhibiting the superiority of His Kingdom over the kingdom of Satan. Satan is a strong man, but Jesus is stronger still!

Have you ever heard someone pray, “*We bind Satan in Jesus’ name!*”?

That terminology is drawn from this illustration. Often the person we pray for is a POW – a spiritual prisoner of war. He’s under the devil’s sinister influence. And before we can

just walk in and free him or her we have to overthrow the guard.

That's why in *warfare prayer* we ask Jesus to bind Satan – and only Jesus can.

Prayer is like a stun gun. Through our prayers, Jesus immobilizes the devil's influence. Then we come in via our witness and love, and take the plunder.

This is why often our witness is worthless until we first pray and bind Satan.

Jesus says in verse 30 **“He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad.”** In His confrontation with the Pharisees there was no neutrality. If someone refused to follow Jesus they were agreeing with the Pharisees that Jesus was of the devil. *A vote to abstain was a vote to oppose.*

Verse 31 is one of the most misunderstood passages in the Bible, and it has caused Christians more unnecessary angst and anxiety than any other verse.

“Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.”

What exactly is **“the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit?”**

First, understand the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

In John 15:26 Jesus said, "When the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me." Here's the principle job of the Holy Spirit - to testify of Jesus. So when Jesus cast out a demon the Spirit was testifying that Jesus was King over all creation.

Now the Pharisees had heard Jesus teach and rejected His wisdom.

They'd seen His miracles and sat back in smug indifference and defiance.

They were at the baptism of Jesus and heard the Father speak from heaven, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" but they turned a deaf ear to Heaven's testimony. They'd read the Father's endorsement of Jesus in the pages of Old Testament prophecy - yet once more denied the truth about Jesus.

In other words, since the Pharisees rejected the Son and rejected the Father - there was one other voice they would hear and that was the voice of the Spirit.

Jesus is telling us we can read the words of the Father in Scripture, and hear the words of Jesus preached from a pulpit - and still turn a deaf ear.

It's not good, but it's understandable.

The Bible teaches us that apart from Jesus a man's spiritual eyes are blinded. Yet when the Spirit probes the depths of his being, and lifts the spiritual blinders - if only for a moment - and we still reject the truth... we have no excuse.

Here's the idea... You can reject the Father's witness - and

there's still the Son. You can reject Jesus and there's still the Holy Spirit's testimony. But once you reject the Spirit's witness of Jesus there's no hope. Heaven grows silent.

Because of His persistence the Holy Spirit is sometimes called "the hound of heaven." But Genesis 6:3 says, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever."

Apparently there are limits to God's patience.

During World War 2 an American fighter left the deck of an aircraft carrier with strict instructions to be back by a certain hour. The two pilots were late.

In the meantime a German Armada had entered the area and in order to hide, the carrier was ordered to kill its lights, and break off all communications. As the pilots made their way back to the ship they couldn't understand why their radios were dead, and why they couldn't find the carrier. They crashed in the icy waters.

The Spirit of God will keep pointing a man to Jesus, and leading him home, but if he keeps rejecting the Spirit's voice there comes a point when God cuts off all communications and withdraws His Spirit. This is the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit - the very sin the Jewish Pharisees were about to commit.

Verse 33 "Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit. Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart

brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things.”

At times everyone can make a regrettable statement. It happens to us all.

But if you could record a person day in and day out - monitor their dialogue – its sum would reveal their true nature. *What's in the heart comes out of the mouth.*

“But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.” What a heavy statement. For the person who is judged, God won't have to go very far to find incriminating evidence.

All He'll have to do is play back his words.

Science tells us that sound waves never cease. They only diminish in intensity.

That means words you speak into the air will never die. They can never be taken back. Every word you speak goes on forever. It has a life all its own.

A news broadcast in Chicago was interrupted with a mysterious message that came over the airwaves... **"Its Howdy Doody Time, Its Howdy Doody Time"**.

Apparently, the Howdy Doody broadcast aired in the 1950s had sailed out into space - bounced off an asteroid or satellite - then returned to earth 30 years later.

Jesus says every word ever spoken can *still be heard* and *will be judged*.

Verse 38 proves Jesus' warning had sailed over the Pharisees, "Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You." But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah."

Jesus had already performed countless signs and wonders – and the Pharisees accused Him of being empowered by the devil. *Now they want more miracles.*

These weren't seekers of truth – they were ambulance chasers, sensationalists. They wanted to miracles for miracles sake. Jesus was not about to cater to their kind of carnality. He says they only other sign they'll get is the sign of Jonah.

"For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection were the only other sign He would supply.

Just as Jonah was 72 hours in the fish's belly – Jesus will be 72 hours in the heart of the earth. We know from Ephesians 4 that between Jesus' death and resurrection He descended to Hades – the Old Testament abode of the dead.

I don't believe the molten, hellish core of the earth is Hades or Hell. Hades occupies a spiritual dimension, but it does overlap the center of the earth.

After Jesus was crucified He went to Hades to preach to those Old Testament believers trusting in His salvation. Three

days later He rose from the dead.

After three days in the whale's belly Jonah was spit up on the beach. He also preached... to Nineveh. And the Ninevites repented of their rebellion...

Verse 41 "The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here. The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here."

Remember **with privilege comes responsibility.**

Nineveh responded in faith to Jonah. The Queen of Sheba trusted in the wisdom of Solomon. Jesus was greater than both Jonah and Solomon.

Verse 43 "When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. Then he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order.

Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first. So shall it also be with this wicked generation."

Jesus is pointing out the difference between *reformation* and *regeneration*.

Often people get tired of sin and its painful consequences. They clean up their act. They reform. They strive to be moral

people, good people, righteous people.

They drive off the demons and sweep out their lives. They get a new paint job.

But if there isn't new management – *it's the same old same old*. The spirit is vacant, and before long the old tenants return and destroy the place again.

This was Jesus' warning to the nation Israel at that time. They were in the midst of a Pharisaical revival. The nation had fallen in love with legalism - and mistaken *morality* for *spirituality*. Jesus is warning, "So what if you clean up the house, but don't receive the life and love of God?" True spirituality involves more than an *emptying out* - it requires an *opening up*, and receiving the life of the Spirit.

Reform is not enough. We need new life – regeneration. True transformation requires more than *taking out* certain sins, but *taking in* the life of Jesus.

Verse 46, "While He was still talking to the multitudes, behold, His mother and brothers stood outside, seeking to speak with Him." The Greek word translated "seeking" is a strong word. They were searching for Jesus to take Him home.

John 7:5 says His brothers didn't believe in Jesus until after the resurrection. Perhaps they thought Jesus had flipped out. He was embarrassing His family.

And they were concerned for His safety. He was making a lot of enemies.

"Then one said to Him, "Look, Your mother and Your

brothers are standing outside, seeking to speak with You." I'm sure Jesus knew their intentions.

"He answered and said to the one who told Him, "Who is My mother and who are My brothers?" And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother." *Jesus was no mama's boy!*

Jesus loved His family, but to Him spiritual bonds had more significance than physical ties. Those closest to Him shared a spiritual connection with His Father.

What's more important to you... your earthly family or spiritual family? Your earthly family lasts a few short years. Your heavenly family lasts forever.

Here's a closing thought that contrasts the Focus on the Family mentality of many believers today. "In a valiant effort to stem the tide, many Christians have made the family everything. Every moment of every day, every involvement, every commitment, every engagement is measured and judged by the question, 'How will this benefit my family?' While this is generally commendable, it can degenerate into a family narcissism. The four walls of the home become a temple and only within and for those walls are sacrifices made. We commit domestic idolatry!"

Never forget our real family - are those who follow Jesus.