

# WITH JESUS OR AGAINST JESUS?

Matthew 12:22-50

Key Verse: 12:30

**“Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.”**

In today’s passage, we can see two responses to Jesus. One is “with Jesus” and the other is “against Jesus.” The Pharisees, teachers of the law and religious establishment were “against Jesus.” Jesus’ disciples and the crowd were “with Jesus.” From that time until now, Jesus has had such a polarizing effect on mankind. What does it mean to be “with Jesus”? It means to acknowledge Jesus as Savior and Lord, and to live under his rule. It is to openly stand on Jesus’ side. Those who are “against Jesus” oppose his Lordship and live as they want. To be “with Jesus” or “against Jesus” is a personal matter for everyone. There is no middle ground; the consequences are serious. These days, the words “On the wrong side of history” are used frequently. History is moving in the direction of equality and civil rights. Those who resist this movement are told, “You are on the wrong side of history.” No one wants to hear this. But there is something even worse. It is to be “on the wrong side of Jesus.” Now we are in the beginning of a new school year. So many young people are going to universities in search of truth, meaning and direction. They need proper guidance. More than anything, they need to hear who Jesus is, find salvation in him, and stand on the side of Jesus. For this, they need shepherds who themselves know Jesus and stand on Jesus’ side. Let’s consider what it means to be “with Jesus.”

In today’s passage, the Pharisees attack Jesus in two ways: through slandering his person, and by demanding a sign from him. In his first answer, Jesus teaches that he works by the Holy Spirit and brings the kingdom of God. In his second answer, Jesus foretells the sign proving that he is the Son of God, and proclaims he is something greater than Jonah and Solomon.

**First, Jesus works by the Spirit of God (22-37).** Verse 22 says, “Then they brought him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see.”<sup>1</sup> Considering verse 14, it seems that the Pharisees brought this man to Jesus to trap him. A blind and

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<sup>1</sup> The pronoun “they” does not appear in the Greek. Other versions —KJV, ESV, NASB— simply say, “A demon-possessed man who was blind and mute was brought to Jesus.”

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mute person was most difficult to heal, and they expected Jesus to fail. But to their surprise, Jesus healed him immediately out of his great compassion. Nothing is impossible to Jesus. Jesus can heal anyone who comes to him. All who saw this were astonished and responded, **“Could this be the Son of David?”** (23) It was obvious to everyone that Jesus is the Messiah.

The Pharisees could not dispute the facts of what had happened. At the same time, they were unwilling to acknowledge the truth. They had already made up their minds to reject Jesus and were determined to kill him. As they heard people’s positive response to Jesus, their blood pressure began to rise. They panicked and were willing to do anything to turn people away from Jesus. In desperation, they attributed his power to Beelzebul, the prince of demons (24). It was a bold, blatant lie. What is the source of such lies? Ultimately, it is Satan, whom the Bible calls **“the father of lies”** (Jn 8:44). Especially, Satan lies about God. He plants doubt about God’s love, slanders God’s character, and hinders people from trusting in God.

How did Jesus handle this slanderous lie? Jesus did not take it personally, become upset and burn the Pharisees with divine fire. Instead, Jesus spoke reasonably and objectively to defend his person and work for the sake of those who would believe in him. Jesus exposed this lie in two ways. First, Jesus exposed the Pharisees’ irrationality. Jesus said, **“Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand”** (25). Internal conflicts within a country, town or even a family will tear it apart. At present, hostility between political parties threatens our national unity. When a husband and wife fight continually, they will eventually destroy their household. Satan is not an exception to the ruin caused by division. Jesus said, **“If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand?”** (26) The Pharisees’ slander was not rational. Satan is not that stupid. Next, Jesus exposed the Pharisees’ hypocrisy. Jesus asked, **“And if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your people drive them out? So then, they will be your judges”** (27). Some people among the Pharisees drove out demons. The ancient historian Josephus affirms this.<sup>2</sup> The same accusation the Pharisees made against Jesus could be made against their own exorcists. The Pharisees’ slander was like spitting into the wind.

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<sup>2</sup> Boice, James Montgomery, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001) p. 213.

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After speaking reasonably, Jesus appealed to them, **“But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you”** (28). The evidence that Jesus’ power source was the Spirit of God is that the kingdom of God came. Why did the kingdom of God need to come? Since Adam’s fall, Satan has been the prince of this world. His rule is called the dominion of darkness. His power was manifest through a man’s body via blindness and muteness. He fills people’s hearts with lies, anger, hatred, violence, lust, pride, jealousy, anger, and depression. Spiritually speaking, Satan blinds the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the light of the gospel (2Co 4:4). Satan is so powerful that no human being can defeat him. But the Spirit of God is more powerful than Satan. The Spirit of God brings God’s reign: restoration, righteousness, love and peace. Jesus’ power source was the Spirit of God. Through Jesus’ ministry, people’s bodies, minds and spirits were fully restored. For example, Jesus drove out a legion of demons from a young man who was rebellious, violent, and self-condemning. The man was changed into a man of peace, who was ready to follow Jesus anywhere (Mk 5:1-20).

In verse 29 Jesus uses an analogy to reveal his power. He said, **“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.”** Satan is the strong man and people under his control are his house. Jesus entered Satan’s dominion, bound him, and set his captives free. Jesus proved that he was stronger than Satan. 1 John 4:4 tells those who believe in Jesus, **“...the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.”**

After defending his ministry, Jesus gave a strong warning to his enemies. Let’s read verse 30. **“Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.”** As we have studied thus far, Jesus is gentle and humble in heart; he does not break a bruised reed or snuff out a smoldering wick (Mt 11:29; 12:19-20). But there is another side of Jesus. In fighting against God’s enemies, he is very strong—the Lion of the tribe of Judah. This Jesus proclaimed that all people can be divided into two categories: with Jesus or against Jesus. Those who are with Jesus will be saved and receive eternal life. Those who are against Jesus will be condemned to eternal punishment. Jesus said, **“Whoever believes and is baptized will be**

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**saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned”** (Mk 16:16). Jesus alone is the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through him (Jn 14:6). These days our culture is becoming more and more pluralistic and relativistic. In the name of tolerance, people try to embrace all kinds of ideas. We should embrace all kinds of people without prejudice. But we must never compromise regarding gospel truth. For example, regarding racial discrimination, the Bible is very clear, both in terms of creation and redemption. All people are created in God’s image, and are thus more valuable than the whole world. Again, all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified freely by Jesus’ grace. There is only one race, the human race. As the song goes, “Red, yellow, black or white, they are precious in his sight; Jesus loves the little children of the world.” The Bible also teaches clearly that there are two genders: male and female, and that marriage is between a man and a woman for life. Of course, there are nuances that must be considered, and sincere Christians can disagree on some points. Nevertheless, as we consider the issues that face this generation, we must always keep in mind what Jesus teaches. We must seek most of all to be on Jesus’ side. Christ is the center of the universe. From him and through him and to him are all things (Ro 11:36). On the last day Jesus will come as the Lord of lords and King of kings to judge the living and the dead. To be with Jesus is the most important thing in each person’s life. Still, to be with Jesus or against Jesus is each person’s decision. Since eternal salvation is such a serious matter, Jesus gives a strong warning about blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (31-32). To blaspheme the Holy Spirit is a flagrant, willful rejection of the work of the Holy Spirit, and attributing his work to Satan. This cannot be forgiven.

In verses 33-35 Jesus uses a tree analogy to explain the root of the Pharisees’ problem. Jesus said, **“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.”** We easily recognize good trees, such as apple, peach, cherry, and so on, by their good fruit. On the other hand, there are bad trees, such as the yew berry tree, the strychnine tree, and others, which are poisonous to people. When Cleopatra was searching for the best way to commit suicide, she gave the fruit of a strychnine tree to her servants. After watching them die a very painful death, she decided to find another way to commit suicide.<sup>3</sup> As

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<sup>3</sup> <http://zidbits.com/2011/07/the-top-10-deadliest-plants/>

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trees are known by their fruit, Jesus teaches that people are known by their words and deeds. Our words and deeds spring forth from our inner nature. The Pharisees' evil inner nature produced their blasphemous words. To bear good fruit they needed to change from within. Jesus rebuked them in the hope they would see their problem: **“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”** (34-35).

Here we learn that to bear good fruit we must become good people. The question is, “How?” The Bible says there is no one righteous, not even one (Ro 3:10). David said, **“Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me”** (Ps 51:5). Training, education and discipline are helpful. But they cannot change the nature of a person. Jesus said, **“Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit... You must be born again”** (Jn 3:6-7). When we repent of our sins and believe in Jesus, the Holy Spirit works to change us. We become a new creation. From that moment, we gradually grow until we can bear good fruit by the help of the Holy Spirit.

What kind of fruit we bear is not a light matter. There will be serious consequences. Jesus warned in verse 36: **“But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken.”** This teaching is not just for the Pharisees, but for “everyone.” The day of judgment refers to Jesus' second coming. When Jesus comes again, we will all stand before his judgment seat, and each one will receive what is due them for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad (2Co 5:10). This day will surely come and no one can escape it. It is notable that the criteria for judgment are the words we have spoken. Words must be used with care. Empty words are careless words. Careless words, like a loaded gun, can bring great harm by accident. Nevertheless, the owner is held responsible for the effect of his or her words. Words can build up others or tear down others. Our words reflect our hearts. In verse 37, Jesus mentions two kinds of words. He said, **“For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.”** Here “acquitted” has the same meaning as “justified.” Words that acquit are words of faith which confess Jesus as Lord and Savior. On the other hand, words that condemn are those which disown Jesus before others (10:32-33). Here we learn that we must

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stand with Jesus by confessing him as our Savior and Lord no matter what the cost. It is a matter of eternal life and eternal condemnation.

**Second, Jesus is more than Jonah and Solomon (38-50).** Though Jesus had given a strong warning and proved that he worked through the Holy Spirit, the Pharisees did not accept his teaching. Instead, they found another way to attack Jesus. Some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, **“Teacher, we want to see a sign from you”** (38). They had just seen an amazing sign. It was just one of many. What kind of sign did they want? Perhaps a spectacular sign from heaven, like a solar eclipse. We don’t know. But their intention was evil. Jesus answered, **“A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah”** (39). Under the bad influence of the religious leaders, the whole generation had become wicked and adulterous. They heard the good news of the kingdom of God and saw numerous miracles. But still they would not repent and accept Jesus as their Messiah. Rather, they demanded to see another miraculous sign. Jesus did not react to people’s demands. Jesus performed miracles in response to faith, and with great compassion. But he did foretell a sign, **“For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth”** (40). This refers to Jesus’ death and resurrection. As Jonah emerged from a huge fish after three days and nights, so Jesus would rise from the dead on the third day. Jesus’ resurrection is the greatest proof that he is the Son of God, the King of kings and Lord of lords (Ro 1:4). Though this sign was given to them, that generation did not accept Jesus as the Messiah. To skeptics, signs are ineffective.

In verses 41-42, Jesus explained what they really needed. It was repentant hearts like those of the people of Nineveh. Jonah was a nationalistic Jew who hated the oppressive Ninevites—the enemies of his people. He did not want the Ninevites to repent, but to be judged and perish. He wanted justice to prevail. But God commanded him to preach to these very people so that they would repent and be saved. When Jonah tried to run away God trained him in the belly of a huge fish. When he repented, God gave him a second chance to preach to the Ninevites. His message was, **“Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown”** (Jnh 3:4). There was no mention of love, mercy or forgiveness, but only judgment. The tone of his message was most likely angry and reluctant. But to his surprise, the whole nation believed

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the message and repented with fasting and dressing in sackcloth. Jesus' second example was the Queen of the South. She traveled all the way from what is now South Sudan to Jerusalem and brought many expensive gifts to hear Solomon's wisdom. Jesus is far, far, far greater than Jonah and Solomon. Jesus is God incarnate. But his own generation did not listen to him and repent. So, the people of Nineveh and the Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with that generation and condemn it. In verses 43-45, Jesus explained how serious their rejection of the Messiah was: Israel would be overrun by the work of demons. Their spiritual condition would be seven times worse than before Jesus came. Indeed, this happened.

Thus far, Jesus has warned those who are against him. In verses 46-50 we find those who are with Jesus. While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him (46). When told about this, Jesus said, pointing to his disciples, **“Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother”** (47-50). Compared to the elite leaders of Israel, Jesus' disciples looked shabby and unimpressive. But they were humble enough to listen to Jesus and follow him. They gave Jesus first priority. They were on the side of Jesus. To Jesus' eyes, they were very precious. They became Jesus' family members. Anyone who is with Jesus, doing the will of God, can become God's family member! God loves them, protects them, blesses them, and watches over them. Ultimately, God gives them eternal life in the glorious kingdom of God. Wow! What a blessing! Let's be with Jesus and stand on the side of Jesus.