Hello everyone,

PERCENT OF BIBLE COMPLETED: 74.1%

Weekly Readings will cover:
Sunday: Luke 7:36 – 50
Monday: Luke 8:1 – 3
Tuesday: Matthew 12:22 – 37 & Mark 3:20 – 30
Wednesday: Matthew 12:38 – 45
Thursday: Matthew 12:46 – 50 & Mark 3:31 – 35
Friday: Preparation Day
Saturday: Sabbath

Current # of email addresses in the group: 732

I hope each of you are doing well. I warms my heart so much each week to know how many of your love God's Word and dedicate yourselves to learning and growing each and every day. May God bless your understanding and growth, giving you knowledge, understanding and wisdom that only can come from God!

We had two new people write and request to join our group this week. Welcome and glad you are with us on this journey through God's Word.

This week again there are long days, typically followed by an easier day, so hopefully throughout the week it feels balanced. Happy studying!

Current and archive of this reading program is available at:
https://www.ucg.org/congregations/san-francisco-bay-area-ca/announcements/audio-links-re-three-year-chronological-deep

The audio archive information is also available on our UCG Bay Area YouTube page here:
https://youtube.com/@ucgbayarea5792?si=EA_tacLBfv1XR3jH
You may actually prefer accessing it directly from this Playlist tab:
https://www.youtube.com/@ucgbayarea5792/playlists

## 3-YEAR CHRONOLOGICAL STUDY: Week 123

Read the following passages & the Daily Deep Dive on the daily reading.

### Day 832 – SUNDAY: November 22nd

Luke 7:36-50
Daily Deep Dive:

Verse 36 – Although some translations begin verse 36 with the word "then," the Greek simply uses a word meaning "and" or "now" to introduce the next account. This does not necessarily indicate that the event happened immediately after the preceding verses, but may simply be Luke transitioning to another event that connects with his overall message. I share that because we left off from the previous verse 35 of Luke by then turning to a section in Matthew 11:20 that does actually begin with the word "then" in Greek, showing that event to have a temporal relationship with the previous verses of Matthew 11:19 & Luke 7:34-35.

Here a Pharisee by the name of Simon (verse 40) invites Jesus to his home for a meal. We aren't told his motivation for doing so, but we will see that Jesus is not treated with the same civilities commonly shown to guests.

While Jesus is often critical of Pharisees and religious leaders, He accepted their invitations. He was willing to associate with tax collectors and sinners, and also the Pharisees and religious leaders.

It's also worth pointing out again that at that time people did not pull up a chair to a dinner table the way we might picture because of our world today. The word in Greek means to "lean back" or "recline". I checked three different literal translations and they all capture the "reclining" of the Greek correctly. As mentioned before they laid on their left sides, using their right hand to eat from a low table in the center, with their feet furthest away. This same "reclining" is how it also should be translated in the next verse as well. This will also explain how the women will be able to approach Jesus' feet without reaching underneath a dining table or interrupt His meal.

Verse 37 - In 1st-century Middle Eastern culture, meals hosted by prominent figures like Simon the Pharisee often took place in an open courtyard or a semi-public room where doors were left open or

uninvited townspeople were permitted to come and go, stand near the walls, and listen to the religious discussions. This explains how this woman of the city could be here in the first place.

This woman is a sinner. The Greek (ἁμαρτωλός - hamartōlos)) means simply that --- and does not identify the particular sin she had committed. Many commentaries assume she was a prostitute, although Luke never states that. We are to conclude that her reputation as a sinner proceeds her.

This is not the Mary of Bethany of John 12:1-8 (also Matthew 26:6-13 and Mark 14:3-9). Christian tradition has sometimes combined their identities. While there are similarities between accounts, there are substantial differences too. This is early in Jesus' ministry, while the other is six days before His final Passover. This is in Galilee, the other is near Jerusalem. This is Simon the Pharisee, while the other is Simon the leper. Here she notably washes His feet with her tears and in the other places, no tears are mentioned. Here the main objection is her reputation, where in the other places it's the cost of the perfume that is the objection. The messages are also very different. This is about forgiveness and love, where the others are about preparing His body for His coming death and burial.

Also note that this is not Mary Magdalene (who Luke introduces us to in the next chapter).

Alabaster was used to keep ointment or oils pure. Such boxes/jars are thought to be common as this stone was found in Damascus.

Verse 38 – The Greek for "weeping" is κλαίουσα (klaiousa) and is more expressive than simply someone having tears in their eyes. She cries so much that it produced enough volume of liquid to wet his feet to such a level that Jesus in verse 44 would compare her tears to the normal

process of a guest being given water to wash his feet. The word for "wash" or "wet" is often connected to "raining".

Notice how much of her every move is recorded here so as to give us a vivid picture of this event. We can imagine that given this woman's reputation, to perform these actions would have required her to be vulnerable and exercise great bravery.

Multiple commentaries mention that in this culture, a woman's hair was an important part of her personal presentation and dignity. Loosening it publicly could be socially unconventional. She doesn't appear to care about what anyone else thought about her except Jesus. Her actions convey a willingness to humble herself before Him.

Regarding the kissing of His feet. The Greek κατεφίλει (katephilei) is in the imperfect active indicative, third-person singular. This is interesting because imperfect tense presents the action as ongoing or in progress. Therefore, Luke is not describing a one-time action, but instead shows her to continue to kiss them over and over. Jesus will emphasize this in verse 45 when He says "this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in".

Perfumes varied considerably in quality and price, and imported aromatic ingredients could make certain preparations especially valuable. However, it's worth noting that Luke never records whether it was costly or not. The word for the fragrant oil in Greek was μύρον (myron) --- which is linguistically related to the English word *myrrh*. However, the Greek word doesn't establish that her perfume contained myrrh specifically.

Here she anoints His feet with oil, which is contrasted in verse 46 with Simon not anointing His head. Anointing the head was a common practice in the ancient world. In this case it could serve the purpose of refreshing, being hospitable to and honoring a guest. It wasn't tied to

some elaborate religious ceremony. Providing water so that a guest could wash his own feet was a customary act of hospitality. Personally washing guest's feet with water was not the custom. However, by this woman's extraordinary act of both washing His feet with her tears and then anointing His feet with oil, she combined both an act of humility with an amazing expression of honor. Like the kissing of His feet, this action of anointing was not expressed in the Greek as a one-time quick action, but an ongoing one. It's also important to distinguish that the Greek word used here for this anointing (involving the application of perfume) is a different Greek word than what would be used for ceremonial anointing.

Verse 39 – So the NKJV translation makes it seem as though he could say this out loud to himself ("he said to himself") which if true would mean that Jesus may have heard what he said. However, the Greek makes it much more likely that he said this inwardly (not out loud). The Greek phrase is εἶπεν ἐν ἑαυτῷ λέγων (eipen en heautō legōn) which literally means "he said within himself (or "in himself"), saying…". The expression normally points to internal speech such as thought, reflection or inward conclusion. This will make Jesus' response even more striking, because He reveals that He knows Simon's unspoken thoughts.

Now notice the assumption of this Pharisee. He said, "IF" Jesus was really a prophet He would know WHO and WHAT KIND of woman this is. The assumption is that Jesus would NOT allow her to be doing what she is doing "IF" He knew this information --- and therefore is NOT a prophet. His assumptions were deeply flawed. At the core of His assumption was the idea of "separationism". Separationism is a religious attitude that maintains holiness and righteousness requires <u>separating oneself from people regarded as sinful and morally impure</u>. The term Pharisee is associated with the Hebrew root, פרש (parash), meaning "to separate" or "to distinguish". For some, not only were

they devoted to separating themselves to faithfulness to God's law and protecting religious purity, they saw it important to make a strong distinction between those considered righteous and those regarded as sinners --- and to distance themselves from those regarded as sinners. Simon here clearly assumes that if Jesus knew who and what kind of woman this was, that Jesus would separate Himself from her. We will see that Jesus DOES know that this woman is a sinner (verse 47) and still doesn't choose to separate from her.

Clearly in Leviticus 10:10 God show that He wants His people to maintain a distinction between holy and unholy and clean and unclean. And clearly God wants His people to live in a righteous way according to His laws and Way. However, separation from sinful practices does not always mean separation from sinful people. We of course don't want to be hanging out with people who are practicing sinful activities. And our inner circle of friends should be people who are striving to live according to God's Way and laws (1 Corinthians 15:33). However, Jesus frequently associated with sinners without endorsing their sins, for the purpose of giving them an opportunity to learn and change if they chose to.

There is a very important principle given by Paul in 1 Corinthians 5:9 through 11. It states: "I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet *I* certainly *did* not *mean* with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person." The clear distinction here is that when someone has been called to this Way of life, but then is choosing to walk in sin, out of love for them and in hoping they will repent and change, we are to separate for a time. If they repent and are striving to walk on the right path,

then we no longer separate. However, the other part here is regarding those who are sinning in the world, and have not yet been called or become committed to God's Way. How can we play a role in modeling and pointing them to Jesus Christ and God's Way if we are separating from these people?

Verse 40 – Notice the polite interaction here as Jesus is a guest in Simon's home.

Verse 41 – Here Jesus begins a very short parable. A denarius was about a day's wage for a laborer. One owes 50 days of wages and another 500 days of wages (10 times the amount of the other).

Does God not recognize that some people sin more than others? That some have more that they need forgiven than others? Of course He does. Jesus clearly shows that here. This isn't the main point of Jesus', but it's still worthy understanding.

Verse 42 – All of us, because we are ALL sinners, had nothing with which to pay and make right our sins with God. Therefore, neither of these people in the parable can repay their debt, whether big or smaller. Both required grace and mercy by the creditor (representing God). The Greek here for "freely forgave" is ἐχαρίσατο (echarisato). It comes from χαρίζομαι (charizomai), related to χάρις (charis), meaning grace or favor. In other words, the creditor didn't establish a repayment plan or require the debtors to earn their forgiveness. He graciously canceled their debts.

The main point of this parable is that even though both were forgiven, the one who was forgiven the most would be the most thankful and loving toward God for His abundant grace, mercy, forgiveness and love toward him.

Verse 43 – It's interesting, maybe even ironic, that here Jesus says "You have rightly judged." Before verse 42, Simon had NOT judged rightly, in either his judgement of what Jesus knew --- or his assessment of how Jesus or someone should behave toward this woman who was a sinner.

Verse 44 – What's interesting here is that Simon's obviously been looking at this woman and judging here, yet Jesus is revealing to Simon that he did NOT in fact truly see her, especially as it relates to her behavior here in his home. He had been contrasting himself as being a righteous person to that of her being an unrighteous person, but he had NOT contrasted her behavior here in his house being right and his behavior being unhospitable. It wasn't her house. It was his. He was responsible for hospitality toward Jesus as his invited guest.

Verses 45-46 - John Wesley's commentary states: "It was customary with the Jews to show respect and kindness to their welcome guests, by saluting them with a kiss, by [giving them water to wash] their feet, and anointing their heads with oil, or some fine ointment." [END]

Verse 47 – Notice, here Jesus finally reveals that He clearly knows this woman is guilty of MANY sins.

This verse deserves careful attention because it can easily be misunderstood. At first glance, we might conclude that the woman received forgiveness *because* she demonstrated great love. However, we should notice the order in the parable: The creditor forgives the debt THEN the debtor responds with love. The forgiveness comes first. The love is the response.

In context, the woman's love can be understood as the *evidence* that she has received forgiveness.

Another point worth stating is that someone who sees little need for mercy may feel little gratitude for the mercy shown them.

Verse 48 – These are the first recorded words of Jesus to the woman herself. He forgave her sins. What an amazing moment for this woman!

Verse 49 – This is the first we are introduced that there are others who were also guests for this meal that have likewise been observing all of these things. They have a similar reaction to what Luke recorded in Luke 5:20-21.

Up until this point, Jesus is being evaluated as a prophet here by Simon at this meal. A prophet could announce God's message of forgiveness, but Jesus speaks with direct authority concerning the forgiveness of sins. Jesus forgiving her sins forces everyone now present, not to just evaluate Jesus as a prophet, but as One who has authority over sin. "Who is this who even forgives sins?"

Verse 50 – Simon doubted Jesus was a prophet. This woman had faith. It wasn't her acts of kindness that saved her, it was her faith in Jesus as her Savior. Her love was the visible expression of what was happening inwardly, but Jesus identifies her faith as fundamental to her salvation.

Before we wrap up this first reading day, it's worth noting the placement chronologically of this in Luke. Luke 7:29-30 contrasts the response of tax-collectors versus the Pharisees and lawyers. Then in verse 34, Jesus is criticized for being "A friend of tax collectors and sinners!". Immediately afterward we get this story that we've gone through today. Luke is showing us what Jesus' friendship toward sinners actually looked like. It wasn't approval of sin. It was a willingness to recognize repentance, extend forgiveness, and receive those who approached Him in faith. And simultaneously, Jesus was exposing the spiritual danger of religious self-confidence.

Where do you see yourself in this story? Do we see ourselves primarily as people who have lived righteously, or as people who have been shown extraordinary mercy by God?

Day 833 – MONDAY: November 23rd

Luke 8:1-3

Daily Deep Dive:

This section is easy to read through but contains a few things we should notice. Luke wants to be sure we notice who is with Jesus as He was both proclaiming (public proclamation of a message) and preaching (the good news nature/character of that message) the Kingdom of God to each village and city in the area. All twelve disciples traveled with Him, but so did Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Susanna. Women, and their contributions, were often ignored in the ancient world. It should be noted that Luke made sure we knew these three were with Jesus. Before we talk about these three women, let's first again notice Luke's emphasis of the prophet Isaiah, here specifically the connection between what Jesus is teaching and Isaiah 61:1: "The Spirit of the Lord GOD *is* upon Me, Because the LORD has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to *those who are* bound;" Luke's repeated use of these prophetic words presents Jesus' ministry as the fulfillment of that prophetic announcement. And then Luke is going to introduce us to three women who likewise needed this "good news"!

Who were these women? Luke introduces us to them as "certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities". The Greek emphasizes that these women had already experienced healing. They were now traveling with Jesus in a healed state. And similar to what we saw in yesterday's reading, after receiving blessings (healing and deliverance) from God the Father and Jesus Christ, they have responded in their lives by helping/supporting Jesus in His work. Specifically, these women were the following:

1. Mary, who is called Magdalene, had seven demons cast out of her. Again, this in the Greek shows that this had already occurred in the past. She likely came from Magdala, a place on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. There were a number of women with the name “Mary”, and this allowed her to be distinguished from the others. Now consider the destruction that seven demons would do to someone’s life. Her life must have been horrible. Remember, thematically, she is introduced to us by Luke shortly after Jesus taught that individuals’ love of Him is often proportional to what He has done in their lives. Mary Magdalene’s love must have been off the chart.
2. Then we are introduced to Joanna. Who was her husband Chuza? John Gill’s commentary states: “Chuza is a Jewish name, and the name of a family of note among the Jews.” John Gill’s commentary continues: “This man, here mentioned, was Herod's steward; a steward of Herod the "tetrarch", of Galilee. The Arabic version calls him his "treasurer"; and the Vulgate Latin, and the Ethiopic versions, his "procurator"; and some have thought him to be a deputy governor of the province under him; but he seems rather to be a governor, or "chief of his house", as the Syriac version renders it: he was one that presided in his family, and managed his domestic affairs; was an overseer of them, as Joseph was in Potiphar's house; and the same Greek word that is here used, is adopted by the Jews into their language, and used of Joseph”. “It was common for kings, princes, and great men, to have such an officer in their families.” [END QUOTES] This raises some interesting questions. Herod Antipas was the ruler who imprisoned John the Baptizer and ultimately will order his execution. Why would this wife of one of Herod’s administrators be supporting Jesus’ ministry? We don’t know. Some commentaries speculate that Chuza may have already died and therefore Joanna, as a widow, was able to travel with Jesus. The Greek doesn’t establish whether Chuza was still alive when Luke

wrote this account. Joanna could have been referred to as his wife even if he had already died. Since Joanna is the feminine form of John, it is likely a common name --- and these details may be used by Luke to accurately identify her, as Luke put considerable effort to write his account in a way where it could be proved to be historically accurate. The Greek also doesn't establish whether Chuza was still holding this position of Herod Antipas. All of this appears to simply be establishing a particular Joanna and someone who likely had some financial means at her disposal. It is interesting that later Herod is eager to see Jesus because he had heard many things about Him (Luke 23:8). Could this connection between Joanna and Herod's household have been one of the means through which Herod received some of his information?

a. I want to include something else that is interesting that has been brought out by pastor Scott Ashley. He has proposed that Chuza held the position of "business manager" for Herod Antipas. This is interesting, because critics have asked, "How did Matthew include such private details of Herod Antipas's royal court?" Matthew recounts private conversations inside Antipas's palace, such as Antipas's personal thoughts about Jesus being John the Baptist raised from the dead, and secret exchanges between Herodias and her daughter. Critics point out that no disciples of Jesus were present at the royal banquet, leading them to view these details as literary dramatization rather than eyewitness reporting. We know that Matthew, being a Jew was a tax collector. The Romans would "farm out" the tax collecting responsibility to the local ruler. The tax collector, like Matthew, wouldn't give the taxes directly to Herod Antipas, he would likely turn those taxes over to Herod's business manager. Did Matthew dive his collected taxes to Chuza? Did Matthew know Joanna? It seems likely. Both Matthew, Chuza and Joanna are Jewish names, and the Jews

despised those who worked for Roman and were involved in their taxation of the Jews. Tax collectors' friends were other tax collectors. Joanna and Matthew both become disciples of Jesus. Joanna living in the palace of Herod Antipas, and having a husband that held a prominent job for Herod, would have likely been privy to a lot of inside information. She likely heard, or her husband shared, intimate details and conversations. It seems likely that she may have been the source from which Matthew received and therefore included these private conversations. Do we know that dogmatically? No.

Also note that Mary Magdalene and Joanna are among the women in Luke 24:10 who report the empty tomb and resurrection to the apostles. These women have been with Jesus from fairly early in His ministry, traveling with Him, and remain faithful through the end!

3. We are lastly introduced specifically to Susanna. She's never mentioned specifically again. However, the fact that Luke names her specifically is significant. He wanted her name preserved, instead of including her in the very next statement "and many others". Even though she is not mentioned again, we don't want to overlook her recorded contribution.

These three women were important to the history of Jesus's ministry. They were actively supporting the ministry of Jesus. The word for supporting is the Greek διηκόνουν (diēkonoun), which means "serving, ministering, providing". This is from the same word family in which we get the English deacon or deaconess. However here Luke is focused on the activity of service --- not a position. Another thing about the Greek διηκόνουν (diēkonoun) is that it's the imperfect tense meaning their activity was ongoing (not a one-time contribution). Luke is describing women who supported Jesus on a regular basis. Luke describes their

resources as their own. Luke doesn't tell us that they were wealthy (although that might be a fair conclusion), only that they were active contributors from their own substance (which in Greek means possessions, goods, property or wealth).

It's worth noting that manuscripts say different things in Luke 8:3. Instead of "for Him" NKJV, some Greek manuscripts say "to Him" and some say "to them". However, as we look at other scriptures, "to Him" seems the most likely (compare Matthew 27:55 and Mark 15:41). Regardless, the larger point remains unchanged: these women helped Jesus' ministry through their own substance.

God's work has long been supported through the willing contributions and practical service of His people, including women whose roles might otherwise receive little attention in the historical record (compare Exodus 35:22, 25-26).

The Gospel accounts naturally focus our attention on Jesus and His twelve apostles, but Luke reminds us that other faithful individuals played meaningful roles in supporting the work being accomplished**.** We will see that Luke keeps bringing us back to the faithful involvement of women all the way until the end of his account (see Luke 23:49, 55 – 56, 24:1-10).

Day 834 – TUESDAY: November 24th
Matthew 12:22-37 & Mark 3:20 – 30
Daily Deep Dive:
Let's begin first in Mark for a couple of verses before shifting to Matthew as our main reading flow.

Mark 3:20-21 – We shouldn't miss the life that verse 20 pictures. Crowds of people were constantly gathering around Him, many seeking something from Him. The demands on His time and attention were so

relentless that He and His disciples sometimes couldn't even find time to eat. The intensity of His ministry had reached a point where those close to Him were becoming concerned for His well-being.

Who were "His own people"? The Greek, οἱ παρ' αὐτοῦ (hoi par' autou), literally means something like "*those belonging to Him or those associated with Him"*. It's likely His family, and I'll explain why. Mark in his writing, will often introduce a subject, then interrupt that situation to share a related encounter, and then return to the original subject/situation he first introduced. Some scholars call this a "Markan sandwich" (which I think is funny). In this case verses 20-21 and 31-35 is the bread of the "sandwich" (indicating these verses are all a part of the same story flow --- but the filling is verses 22 to 30, which is the story Mark inserts in the middle.

The theme that connects the two ends is that people appear concerned about the behavior of Jesus. One seems genuine --- and is a misunderstanding of His focus on His great purpose. The other --- in opposing the work Jesus is doing, accuses Him of working for Satan. Two very different concerns.

The first group actually care about Jesus and are concerned that He is behaving irrationally and had lost His senses. Mark will jump from here to the parallel story describing how the scribes say He is demon possessed.

Matthew introduces the story differently. Matthew 12:22 – Here we are introduced to this topic by seeing that an actual demon-possessed man is brought to Jesus who couldn't see or speak. Jesus healed the man, implying that He cast out the demon, and restored the man's sight and ability to speak.

Matthew 12:23 – Why as a response to this miracle did the multitude ask “Could this be the Son of David?” The people knew prophetic Messianic passages, such as Isaiah 11:1-3 where it states “There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, And a Branch shall grow out of his roots. The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD. His delight *is* in the fear of the LORD, And He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, Nor decide by the hearing of His ears;” Combining that passage from Isaiah to other passages such as Isaiah 35:4-6 where it states “Say to those *who are* fearful-hearted, "Be strong, do not fear! Behold, your God will come *with* vengeance, *With* the recompense of God; He will come and save you." Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, And the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, And the tongue of the dumb sing. For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, And streams in the desert.” In all of this, the people were trying to figure out who Jesus really was and His place from a biblical standpoint. Last week we saw how in the previous chapter (Matthew 11:4-5), Matthew has already been illustrating how Jesus is fulfilling the prophetic Messianic words of Isaiah. This creates a problem for the Pharisees and religious leaders who are more concerned about keeping the status quo and maintaining their positions of authority than seeking the truth.

Matthew 12:24 - The name Βεελζεβούλ (Beelzeboul) is associated with the god of Ekron (Baal-Zebub) in 2 Kings 1:2-3. There is a range of thoughts about this name meaning. Adam Clarke’s commentary states: “It is supposed that this idol was the same with זבוב בעל Baalzebub the god fly, worshipped at Ekron, who had his name changed afterwards by the Jews to זבול בעל Baal zebul, the dung god, a title expressive of the utmost contempt. It seems probable that the worship of this vile idol continued even to the time of our Lord; and the title, being applied by the Jews to our blessed Lord, affords the strongest proof of the

inveteracy of their malice." [END] There are yet other ideas. But even if we aren't certain of the meaning of the name, the point they are trying to make is unmistakable, and that is that Jesus is working for and empowered by the ruler of demons. We should notice that the religious leaders can't deny the miracle, so instead, they re-frame that miracle of not being by the power of God, but instead by the power of Satan (ruler of the demons)

Matthew 12:25-26 – Jesus shows that their accusation is fundamentally flawed. If a demon has come and possessed a person, on behalf of the ruler of those demons, then if Jesus is empowered by the same ruler of the demons and He casts out that same demon, then that demonic kingdom is working against itself. What would be the point of that? Jesus goes on to state a clear principle from life that any kingdom or house that is working against itself will fall.

Matthew 12:27 – This verse starts "And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul..." The word εἰ (ei) means "if," and here it introduces a <u>first-class conditional statement</u> in Greek. In this construction, the speaker presents a proposition as true <u>for the purpose of the argument</u>, without necessarily affirming that it actually is true. We talked about this same type of Greek statement as related to the words of Satan in Matthew 4:3 & 6. We could use "since" instead of "if" in these verses to understand how the Greek is setting up the statement. Jesus is essentially asking them, since the only way I can do this is because I'm empowered by Satan, who are your sons (those who come from you) empowered by?

There were Jewish traditions of exorcism in the first century. Josephus, for example, describes an exorcism performed by a Jewish man named Eleazar (*Antiquities* 8.45–49)

Matthew 12:28 – We understand the Kingdom of God will be established here on earth at the second coming of Jesus Christ. Then how do we reconcile Jesus' statement here? Jesus is showing the authority of that Kingdom is already present. Jesus, as the Son of God, was exercising God's authority over Satan and his demons. The power of that Kingdom was being demonstrated through the Messiah.

Matthew 12:29 – Jesus continues by helping them to clearly understand how and why He is able to cast out demons. He clearly must have power over the ruler of that house. Just like if someone came into the house where someone super strong lives, that person wouldn't just let someone walk out of their house with all their stuff. To do that, they would have to first bind/tie/restrain that strong person, and then they would be able to take away what he previously owned and controlled. The clear point is that Jesus can take away what Satan previously controlled because He first has power over Satan. And we know in the future that God will have an angel bind Satan for 1,000 years during the millennial reign of Jesus Christ. God and Jesus Christ will simply dispatch an angel to bind Him --- showing that it's no competition between them and Satan.

Matthew 12:30 – The clear point is that the Pharisees were not just simply refusing to accept Jesus or participate in His work, they were actively working against Him, and therefore working against God. These people were actively opposing God's work.

Matthew 12:31-32 – We now come to two of the least understood verses in the Bible. What can't be forgiven here? What is blasphemy? The Greek noun is βλασφημία (blasphēmia) and carries the idea of slander, defamation or abusive speech. Our English word actually comes from the Greek. Interestingly, the same word is used in Titus 3:2 about "speaking evil" of another person.

A person can misunderstand Jesus' identity, His mission and His authority and be forgiven if done in ignorance. Throughout the Bible there is a clear pattern regarding sins that are not forgiven, what has often been referred to as "unpardonable sins". In *Fundamental Beliefs of the United Church of God*, under "God's Law and Sin," UCG states: "…the only sin that cannot be forgiven is the fully informed, willful refusal to repent, utterly rejecting God and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, by which forgiveness of sin is made possible." Therefore Matthew 12:31 must be describing blasphemy against the power of God (His Spirit) knowing it is a rejection of God's power and authority. Again, this includes knowledge, willful rejection and unrepentance.

This was a warning from Jesus Christ rather than a condemnation that every Pharisee who was accussing Him of working for Satan had already committed an irreversible sin (an unpardonable sin).

I want to again emphasize that someone can lack knowledge of Jesus Christ and later learn and repent of their foolishness or error. However, the meaning here seems clear that if someone fully recognizes God's power and deliberately rejecting it, then they have made their fully informed decision with both knowledge and responsibility. We see a strong connection to this passage and what is described in Hebrews 6:4-6 and 10:26-29. Specifically, there in Hebrews 10:26 uses the Greek Ἑκουσίως (hekousiōs) which means deliberately, intentionally or willingly. These passages concern a hostile rejection of God's grace and testimony and a willful rejection of the truth after receiving knowledge of it.

Christ's warning therefore emphasizes both the seriousness of deliberately resisting God's work and the importance of remaining responsive to His Spirit.

One last point worth emphasizing before we move beyond this section is that Mark 3:30 says "because they said, "He has an unclean spirit.""

In the Greek it's written using the imperfect verb, which means they said it and kept on saying it. It emphasizes that this wasn't a one-time mistake, but a persistent resistance to what God was doing before them through Jesus Christ. Remember the previous lessons where Christ said it was going to be more tolerable for those cities where His great miracles were not performed. These religious leaders were witnessing over and over the power of God through Jesus Christ, and were corrected for it --- and yet they persisted in their willful refusal to receive that correction and be taught.

Matthew 12:33 – One thing I have been appreciating in our study is reading passages we are covering in their broader context. Here again, if we read this without what we've already covered today, it's interesting in its own right for sure, but in the context of the religious leaders and their rejection of Jesus Christ and the miracles God was doing through Him hits us slightly differently.

The Pharisees have seen the good things that Jesus has done (healings, restoration of lives, kindness, etc.) and yet they have criticized Him as being bad and being empowered by a bad source. Jesus seems to be saying, the fruit can't be good and the tree bad, and vice versa. The two, the fruit and the tree, have to be of the same quality. So if you acknowledge the fruit is good, then you have to call the tree good (and therefore the source good). They all go together.

Matthew 12:34 – Jesus then turns the same logic on them. If they are evil, how could they produce good fruit? They needed a new heart, and yet, they didn't see that need. Jesus associates them with vipers, animals who are clearly venomous and harmful. Here He clearly exposes the very nature and problem with those who are falsely accusing Him of being evil and working for the leader of the evil ones (Satan). The Pharisees' accusations were not merely inaccurate statements. Jesus was using their words as evidence of what was taking place within their hearts.

Matthew 12:35 – Similar to other passages we've already looked at in the past couple weeks, we have the idea of a storehouse where treasures are accumulated --- and that from what we've treasured eventually overflows out. And what overflows reveals what has been treasured all along. The Pharisees' hearts and what they treasured and what they had been storing up over time, was being revealed by what was overflowing out of their mouths. **Our words are not merely isolated events. They may reveal patterns of thought and attitudes that have been developing within us.**

Matthew 12:36 – An idle word in Greek means inactive, unproductive or useless. It's related to the idea of "not working". Our words should be productive and useful. Jesus is warning the Pharisees who have been critical of Him and throwing around careless accusations that words are not insignificant and will carry consequences.

Jesus says "they will give account" for these words. The verb ἀποδίδωμι (apodidōmi) can carry the sense of giving back, paying what is owed, or rendering what is due. Jesus is not simply saying that the words will be remembered. He is saying that people will be accountable for them.

Matthew 12:37 – By our words we will be either justified or condemned. Both are future passive forms. Our words will provide evidence of the state of our hearts when we come before the Judge. We want our words, as a type of fruit of our lives, to point to the clear evidence, we are a good tree.

<u>Day 835 – WEDNESDAY: November 25th</u>
Matthew 12:38-45
Daily Deep Dive:
Verse 38 - What sign did they want to see from Jesus? Jesus has already healed a man with a withered hand (Matthew 12:9-13) and healed a demon possessed man who was both blind and mute

(Matthew 12:22), just in this chapter alone. The immediate context is that the Pharisees have just accused Jesus of being empowered by Satan, and Jesus has shown them how that logic makes no sense. They now want a sign, one that they feel will validate that Jesus is in fact from God. The word in Greek here for sign is **σημεῖον (sēmeion) --- and it means a distinguishing mark, indication or sign. It can be used for a miracle, but it doesn't necessarily mean miracle. It's something that provides evidence or confirms something as true. Here it's specifically something they want to "see" as that evidence. In other words, it's not just another miracle of and by itself (which they have already concluded could be empowered by Satan), but something that will be proving evidence concerning where His authority and power comes from.** Asking God for understanding or confirmation is not inherently wrong. The problem here is that the Pharisees are requiring further evidence while refusing to accept what has already been demonstrated.

Verse 39 – Jesus calls their generation "evil and adulterous", because they are seeking a sign. Evil can mean of a "bad nature" or wicked, which likely makes sense to us based on the nature of the Pharisees and religious leaders. Why adulterous? This was an Old Testament theme that these religious leaders would be well aware of. For example, in Jeremiah 3:6-10, adultery is the way God describes Israel's unfaithfulness to Him. In Hosea 2:2-5, Hosea must marry an unfaithful wife as a metaphor of Israel's unfaithfulness and harlotry. There are more examples as well. So what's the connection here? These leaders are supposed to be the biblically educated and religious leaders of God's people, yet they are actively rejecting and fighting against the One whom God has sent. This becomes even more ironic when we consider that Jesus Christ was the God that the ancient Israelites heard and saw as He interacted and led them. The religious leaders are demanding proof/evidence from the very One to whom their covenant faithfulness should have directed them.

Another interesting thing in this verse is that the Greek says they are "seeking a sign as an ongoing activity", as the Greek, **ἐπιζητεῖ (epizētei),** is in the present active indicative. That's not faithfulness. If you constantly or continually need evidence to be provided, then you are not practicing faith. God, through Jesus, has already provided plenty of evidence. They just were unwilling to see it and have faith.

Jesus continues that He would provide one and only one sign of evidence they were seeking. This is one of the most important prophetic statements Jesus makes concerning His own death, resurrection and identity. This would be a sign connected to the prophet Jonah, a story they would know well.

Verse 40 – The verse opens with "For as". The construction explicitly establishes a comparison between Jonah and Jesus Christ. The comparison of course isn't about every detail of the story of Jonah, it's about one facet: A specified period of time that would be the same. In this case, that the period Jonah spent in the belly of the fish would equal the time Jesus would spend in the heart of the earth --- an exact, specified duration of 3 days and 3 nights. What's interesting is this exact phrase in the Greek here, **τρεῖς ἡμέρας καὶ τρεῖς νύκτας (treis hēmeras kai treis nyktas), matches the Greek of Jonah 1:17 in the Septuagint. I**'ve made this point before, but it's worth emphasizing that, from my research, the Septuagint—the Greek translation of the Old Testament—was widely used in the first century, particularly among Greek-speaking Jews throughout the Roman world. It also became the primary Old Testament text used by early Greek-speaking Christians. This is significant because many of the Old Testament quotations found in the New Testament closely follow the wording of the Septuagint --- rather than the Hebrew text reflected in most of our modern Old Testament translations.

Another interesting Jonah connection is that Jonah describes his situation in Jonah 2:2 as "Out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and You heard my voice." He describes his experience using terminology associated with the grave, making it a fitting prophetic parallel to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Jesus was buried shortly before sunset on Wednesday and resurrected shortly before sunset on the weekly Sabbath, Saturday. This provides three complete nights and three complete days. The traditional mainstream understanding of a Friday death and Sunday morning resurrection cannot give you 3 nights, even if you counted partial day time portions of a Friday day and a Sunday day. In other words, you are missing a whole night --- and Jesus didn't say "3 days and 2 nights". Either this is true as the only sign/evidence that Jesus said He would provide to that evil/adulterous generation, or Jesus wasn't who He claimed to be. That's why this section of scripture is so important.

Verse 41 - Nineveh was an important Assyrian city. The Assyrians were known for military aggression and brutality, and their empire would eventually become a major enemy of Israel. This verse clearly shows that BOTH the people of Nineveh and these non-responsive Israelites would rise up together in the time of future judgment.

At that time, Nineveh will condemn this evil/adulterous generation that Jesus was speaking to. One of the definitions that Thayer's Greek dictionary has for this "condemns" is "one's good example to render another's wickedness the more evident". Nineveh responded to Jonah's message, and Jonah was a reluctant prophet. Their example will expose the inexcusable nature of that generation's unbelief. Here they have the Son of God (greater in identity, authority, message and work) doing all sorts of miracles --- and Jesus uses these Gentile people to expose the hardness of the Pharisees' hearts which should have been the most receptive to God's message.

Verse 42 – Jesus is referring to the Queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10:1-13 & 2 Chronicles 9:1-12). The queen had heard about the extraordinary wisdom of Solomon and traveled a great distance to investigate it personally. Here they had the One who had even greater wisdom and authority, and they didn't have to travel any great distance to investigate it or search Him out --- and yet they rejected Him. Similar to the previous verse, her example at the time of judgement will expose the wickedness and lack of response and effort of "this generation" of verse 42.

Verses 43 to 45 – A person can experience some degree of deliverance or reformation, in coming out of this satanic world, and yet ultimately end up in a worse condition if genuine spiritual transformation does not follow. The apostle Peter describes something similar in 2 Peter 2:20–22, which describes people who escape the pollutions of the world but later become entangled in them again. Peter also says their latter end is worse than their beginning.
Ultimately Jesus explains the story's immediate application: "So it will be also with this evil generation."

Consider Israel's history as a whole. God had brought the Jewish people through extraordinary experiences. By the first century, the widespread idolatry that characterized earlier periods of Israelite history was no longer the dominant feature of Jewish religious life. The Pharisees in particular were deeply committed to preserving religious observance and avoiding idolatry. This likely was originally driven by a deep zeal and sincerity for God's Way --- but overtime something negative had occurred in the lives and attitudes of these religious leaders. In certain outward respects, the "house" might have appeared swept and put in order. Many of them looked outwardly religious while being spiritually unresponsive to God. And because they refused to receive what God was providing through Jesus Christ, their final condition could become worse than their earlier one.

The lesson for us is that merely recognizing God's truth, removing obvious sins, or maintaining an outward appearance of religion is not enough. We've seen this theme all through the Sermon on the Mount and the continuing verses we've covered beyond that, that God desires a genuine response to His truth—one that causes us to look deeply within our hearts and examine our motives, leading to repentance, conversion, and a life increasingly yielded to and directed by Him, so that we can become like the Family of God.

Day 836 – THURSDAY: November 26th
Matthew 12:46-50 & Mark 3:31-35
Daily Deep Dive:
Mark 3:31 – This verse does not begin with "then" in the Greek. Translators have added it, or translated it this way, to keep a flow to the events in Mark. But this word being missing in the Greek allows for the extra content of Matthew to be inserted chronologically, as we've covered earlier this week.

We now finally get to the other end of this "Markan Sandwich". As a reminder, Jesus' family may have come to see Him because they are worried He's losing His mind and not taking care of His basic needs, like eating. The extraordinary demands of His ministry are evident. His family seem genuinely concerned, likely about His health, exhaustion, and overall safety.

When Jesus is approached that His mother and brothers are outside wanting Him, He doesn't miss this opportunity to teach an incredibly important lesson. His mother and brothers were literally physically outside --- whether that means outside a home or meeting place, or outside of the crowded location and couldn't penetrate the multitude. Jesus seems to use this physical proximity of being outside/inside, as being spiritually on the outside versus on the inside. He also does a

comparison between being literally physical blood family, with what it means to be His spiritual family. **A biological relationship to Jesus does not automatically establish the spiritual relationship He has been describing in His messages. He's not making the point that His biological mother and brothers are not, or will not, also be spiritual family. That's not the point He's making.**

Within their society, family was super important. A person's family provided identity, inheritance, economic security, social standing and obligations. He wasn't teaching that biological families were not important. He was explaining that those who were truly doing God's Will were His family. It's a beautiful picture of Jesus looking around at those seated near Him, extending His hand toward His disciples, and identifying them as His family. The point is not that He has ceased to love His biological family. He is revealing the existence of another family relationship—one established through obedience to God.

It's important to recognize that Jesus does not limit His statement to a particular nationality, gender, family lineage, or social position (compare with Paul's teaching in Galatians 3:28 & Colossians 3:11). He is describing a spiritual family that can include anyone who responds to God appropriately. This is especially important given the strong importance placed on genealogy and ancestry in Jewish society. The religious leaders of Jesus' day put a lot of stock in their ancestry --- and thought they were secure in their relationship with God. Jesus shows that belonging to God's people is not merely a matter of possessing a particular ancestry or religious identity.

With all we've covered concerning the appearance of the Pharisees, it's important to note, Jesus is not merely identifying those who know about God's will or who profess allegiance to God. He specifically describes people whose response to God is characterized by doing His will.

Matthew 12:50/Mark 3:35 – Both accounts only include that His mother and brothers came, but both of these accounts reveal that Jesus includes the word “sisters” when talking about His true spiritual family. Jesus regularly demonstrated that women were equally capable of becoming devoted disciples. Consider the account of Mary and Martha in Luke 10:38–42, where Mary sits at Jesus' feet listening to His teaching. To sit at the feet of a teacher was a recognizable posture of discipleship. We may not all be asked to serve in the same way now in the body of Jesus Christ, but Jesus is clear to show the shared spiritual identity that includes both genders.

It’s also worth noting that while it appears Jesus’ four brothers (Matthew 13:55 and Mark 6:3) were not believers during His physical ministry on earth (John 7:5), at least two of them became believers after His death (James per Galatians 18-19 and Jude per Jude 1:1) --- and possibly all of them (per Acts 1:14 and 1 Corinthians 9:5).

How many people have had physical blood families distance themselves because they came into God’s Church and gave up of the practices of this world? Many! Many of you!

God does not leave us without Family! Consider Mark 10:29-31 (parallel accounts in Matthew 19:29 & Luke 18:29-30) where it states "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time—houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions—and in the age to come, eternal life.

I’m thankful to count all of you as my Family and appreciate your dedication to growing to become like our brother Jesus Christ!

Day 837 – FRIDAY: November 27th
Preparation Day

Day 838 – SATURDAY: November 28th
Sabbath