

Questions Jesus Asked, Part Five

Matthew 12:22-30

Hebrews 12:8-10, Philippians 3:20-21, 1 Peter 2:11, John 18:36

1. A pledge of obedience.

- *Romans 6:16-18*

2. A pledge of dependence.

- *John 15:5*

3. A pledge of allegiance.

- *Luke 9:23-26; Romans 13:1; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13*

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Michael O'Neill

Questions Jesus Asked, Part Five *Matthew 12:22-30*

We are in a summer sermon series called, "Questions Jesus Asked." *Every* time Jesus taught, spoke, or did something, his message and methods were always on purpose. So here's the thing: *any* interaction Jesus had with anyone in the Gospels is an interaction he can and will have with *each of us*.¹ That means his questions are important, and our answers to Jesus' questions will determine the depth of our relationship with Jesus, will determine the success of our Christian life, the fruit of our Christian life, and the impact of our Christian life. We must answer Jesus' questions well if we are going to accomplish a life of purpose in this world that God has for us.

The question that Jesus asked that we are looking at today is a powerful question that every believer in Jesus must consider, especially today, on our national Independence Day. I'm going to read the Scripture passage to us, and as I do, please do your best to imagine yourself in the scene as it plays out – as if you are one of the disciples watching and listening. That's important because remember, if we are going to be changed by God's Word, then we should never read Scripture as a *spectator*; always read Scripture as a *participant*. *We are in the narrative*. Okay? I'd like to ask you to honor the God's Word by standing as I read it today:

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. All the people were astonished and said, "Could this be the Son of David?"

But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons."

Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand. If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? And if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your people drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can plunder his house. Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters." (Matthew 12:22-30, niv)

This is the Word of God for the People of God – so, thanks be to God! You can have a seat; thank you for standing.

¹ Bible Study Series: Best Questions in the Bible <https://jesusplusnothing.com/series/post/JesusQuestions>

I want to follow the same pattern we've used in the other messages of this series, so I want to give you the context of the question, and then I want to give us the application of what it means for us today – especially today, on our Independence Day.

This passage we just read is part of a larger section of Matthew that establishes Jesus' authority as God, and in this chapter his authority is further clarified as he is in conflict with what had become of the religion of Judaism; by this time, the Jewish religion had become a collection of rules under the guise of nationalism, and they had long since abandoned their relationship with their God. The point is clear: Jesus is Lord over *all* religion – even Judaism – and you'd better believe that was a threat to the Jewish religious leaders' power. So in this chapter, we see the religious leaders attacking Jesus by making some horrible accusations against him after he heals a man.

The Pharisees (the Jewish religious leaders) made accusations against Jesus for healing a blind and mute man. It was common at that time to attribute those issues to demon possession. Jesus healed him, so this made the very clear point that Jesus has power even over the demonic. The crowds were astonished by this, and began to wonder if he was the Messiah (they used the term "Son of David," which was a common title for the Messiah).

There was no questioning Jesus' power and the miracle itself, so the only thing the Pharisees could question was, by *whose* power did Jesus do these things? In verse 24, we see their conclusion and accusation that Jesus did this by Beelzebul, the prince of demons. That name might be a weird one or unfamiliar to you, but in history and by this time it was synonymous with Satan. So the leaders of religion accuse Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Satan. Demons were under the control of Satan, so therefore, they said, Jesus must be Satan.

Then, in verses 25-26, Jesus makes his first argument against their accusation, pointing out that, if what they were saying was true, then Satan would be divided against himself. So Jesus uses a very brief parable comparing it to political and military scenes that people would understand, and that was this: A kingdom, or a city, or even a household divided against itself will not stand – at least not for long. To fight with one's self leaves one vulnerable to the enemy outside.

But the accusation against Jesus, that he is casting out demons by working with Satan is ridiculous. Satan would never agree to something like that because it would weaken his own power.

So the only right conclusion is that Jesus is able to do what he does by the power of the Holy Spirit – by God himself – because Jesus *is* God himself; and that makes the religious leaders' accusations blasphemy.

So Jesus asked the question we are considering today:

"If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand?" (Matthew 12:26)

Then Jesus follows up with a couple of other questions, but both of those questions are really only supportive in making the point of the original question: How can a house divided against itself still stand?

Now, for sure Jesus' question is descriptive of the condition our nation finds itself in right now. I'm concerned about that, I think we should pray about that, and I think as the church and as followers of Christ who are peacemakers, we should do all we can to bring healing to that. But this is *not* a sermon about *that*.

I'm concerned as well that we've let the division in our country become acceptable within the body of Christ, too. It seems like we enjoy arguing and fighting each other over the political issues going on in our world today. I love something Pastor Andy Stanley said in a recent sermon: "Why don't we despise division as much as we despise people who don't vote like us?" Because truly, we ought to despise division in the body of Christ above all other things. But this is *not* a sermon about *that*, either.

This is a sermon that answers the question that Jesus asked about how a kingdom divided against itself can stand. What makes it easy for us to answer is that Jesus gives us the answer, but the answer is profoundly important, and it's one we need to spend our time understanding today. The answer to Jesus' question comes in verse 30:

"Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters." (Matthew 12:30)

Since Jesus clearly answered his own question, I want to talk to us this morning about what that means for us, especially on this day when we remember how grateful we are to be citizens of the United States of America. It is right that we should celebrate that citizenship, but Christians: we have a deeper loyalty, a deeper society, a deeper citizenship. As believers in Jesus, if you have put your faith in Christ, you have gained citizenship in a new country, a new government, a new Kingdom, one that has a much different and deeper declaration than the US.

Hebrews 11:8-10 describes one of the members of this different nation, and his attitude toward this world – a man named Abraham:

"By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God." (Hebrews 12:8-10, niv)

The Apostle Paul was another alien in this country and world, and he clarified the issue for us in Philippians:

"But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body." (Philippians 3:20-21, niv)

Since we are citizens of the Kingdom of God if we are in Christ, our deepest loyalty is *not* this country or any other human government or political structure. We operate by a different set of principles, we have a different allegiance, a different declaration. The Apostle Peter points out:

“Dear friends, since you are immigrants and strangers in the world, I urge that you avoid worldly desires that wage war against your lives.”
(1 Peter 2:11, ceb)

We don't belong here! If we are in Christ we are like immigrants and strangers, and our allegiance is to another Kingdom. As a matter of fact, when Jesus was asked by Pilate what Kingdom *he* belongs to, Jesus answered:

“My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.” (John 18:36, niv)

We belong to Jesus' Kingdom.

When I was a kid in grade school going to Keizer Elementary, every morning in first grade with Mrs. Roth, second grade with Mrs. Pittman, third grade with Mrs. Bryant, fourth grade with Mrs. Middleton, fifth grade with Mrs. Carpenter, and sixth grade with Mr. McClure (pretty good, huh? Don't ever say that teachers don't make an impact!), but first thing every morning we'd stand and sing “My Country, Tis of Thee” and then we'd put our right hand over our heart and recite the pledge of allegiance to the flag, and to the republic for which it represents. But at the age of seventeen, I took a *new* pledge – for Christ. Today I want to talk about the pledge of believers in Christ, which is the answer to the question Jesus asked.

First, it is...

1. A pledge of ***obedience***.

As Christians – citizens of the Kingdom of God – we are obligated to obey Christ. Why? Because he made us? That's a good reason, but no. Because he made the laws of the Kingdom? That's a good reason, but no. Because we'll spend eternity in hell if we don't? Another good reason, but no. We are obligated to obey him because, out of his great love for us, *he set us free*. Paul explains it this way:

“Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.” (Romans 6:16-18, niv)

Christ bought us with his own life and set us free from sin and death out of his great love for us so that we could have a great life now and forever; so now, out of our

love for him, we are obligated to serve him in obedience. We obey the laws of His Kingdom; we make a pledge of obedience.

Secondly is...

2. A pledge of dependence.

In John 15:5, Jesus says:

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5, niv)

We are dependent on Jesus like a branch to a vine. As Christians we pledge our total dependence upon Jesus – *not* our total *independence*. In our country we have become so obsessed with independence that we all insist on our rights and what we think our entitlements are that now, in some major cities, they won’t prosecute theft of property. If someone stole your property, it’s because you have it and they don’t, therefore they are entitled to it.

At the same time, we have become so “independent” in pursuing our individual rights and our material goods – like cell phones and social network apps – that we’ve become totally isolated and alienated from each other. We are being influenced by the opinions of trolls from the internet’s ethosphere, whose only purpose is to cause social disruption. Friends, we **MUST** be totally dependent on Christ! That’s always been true.

Archeologists and historians have found a letter written in the second century. The author is unknown, but the letter is addressed to a man by the name of Diognetus. In the letter, the author describes Christians as a strange people who are in the world but not of the world:

“Christians are not differentiated from other people by country, language, or customs; you see, they do not live in cities of their own, or speak some strange dialect...They live in both Greek and foreign cities, wherever chance has put them. They follow local customs in clothing, food, and the other aspects of life. But at the same time, they demonstrate to us the unusual form of their own citizenship.

They live in their own native lands, but as aliens...Every foreign country is to them as their native country, and every native land as a foreign country.

They marry and have children just like everyone else, but they do not kill unwanted babies. They offer a shared table, but not a shared bed. They are passing their days on earth, but are citizens of heaven. They obey the appointed laws and go beyond the laws in their own lives.

They love everyone, but are persecuted by all. They are put to death and gain life. They are poor and yet make many rich. They are dishonored and yet gain glory through dishonor. Their names are blackened, and yet they are cleared.

They are mocked and bless in return. They are treated outrageously and behave respectfully to others.

When they do good, they are punished as evildoers; when punished, they rejoice as if being given new life. They are attacked by Jews as aliens and are persecuted by Greeks; yet those who hate them cannot give any reason for their hostility.”

What a description of our dependence! Our citizenship in the Kingdom of God is the same as those Christians that are described of the second century. We make a pledge of obedience, a pledge of dependence, and finally...

3. A pledge of *allegiance*.

In answer to his own question, Jesus very clearly gives us our call to allegiance. In Luke’s Gospel, as well as many other places in the Gospels, Jesus says this over and over:

“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self? Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.”
(Luke 9:23-26, niv)

Our allegiance to Christ and his Kingdom is very definitely an all-or-nothing commitment and devotion, before any other allegiances, including to the United States of America. But, that doesn’t mean we don’t submit to any authority here. In fact, it is just the opposite – we submit to authority here *because* we submit to God:

“Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.” (Romans 13:1, niv)

And in another Scripture passage:

“Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good...” (Titus 3:1, niv)

And, in yet another passage:

“Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority...” (1 Peter 2:13, niv)

Yes, we *are* to submit to governing authority, but if we are ever asked to choose, or forced to choose, we always and without hesitation choose Christ. We submit to God, who tells us to submit to governing authorities. But we can’t have both.

There is an interesting story from history about Ivan the Terrible. He was the grand prince of Moscow in the 1500s and was known to be an intelligent and ruthless leader, best known for his erratic behavior and his brutality. He was so busy

conquering new territory for his country that he had no time to find a wife. His advisors became concerned that he had not married, and therefore would not produce an heir to the throne. So Ivan commanded his men to find him a suitable wife who was beautiful, intelligent, and the daughter of a nobleman.

They found her in Greece. Her name was Sophia, the daughter of the king of Greece. Ivan asked the king for his daughter's hand in marriage and the king agreed on the condition that Ivan be baptized and join the church. Ivan agreed and set out for Greece to be married, accompanied by five hundred of his best soldiers.

When they discovered that Ivan was to be baptized, the soldiers said they wanted to be baptized also. A requirement of baptism was to make a profession of faith and to affirm the articles of the Orthodox Church, which also required allegiance to Christ alone. The soldiers agreed to do so – almost. The article they couldn't affirm was one which prohibited them from being professional soldiers. They asked the priest if they could have some time to think over the problem of how to join the church and at the same time remain soldiers in Ivan's army.

They devised a plan among themselves and announced that they were ready to be baptized. They marched out into the water, all five hundred of them, with five hundred priests. As the priests put the soldiers under the water, each soldier grasped his sword and lifted it high in the air. The soldiers were baptized completely, except for their swords and their fighting arms.

Friends, there is no partial allegiance to Christ; no "almost" dependence. When you are a Christian, your first obedience, dependence, and allegiance is to Christ. All other allegiances fall under Him.

We have the opportunity to make our declaration of dependence today, but practicing something that is much deeper than saying the pledge of allegiance. We are going to share together in communion as a pledge of our obedience, dependence, and allegiance to Christ. Let this action be your pledge of obedience, dependence, and allegiance, because he gave his life for you.

Prayer

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." (Colossians 3:16-17)