

Are you with me? Matthew 12v9-32

Have you ever missed something right in front of you because you weren't expecting it?

If we see sweet and call it bitter, if we see good and call it evil (Isaiah 5v20), we're in danger of missing out on who God is and the sweetness of knowing him. The Pharisees in this passage are zealous and religious, but are in grave danger of doing just that. *How can seeing Jesus more clearly enable us to know that sweetness?* (See, for example, John 14v9-10).

1) Jesus is gentle (12v9-21)

Jesus is in the synagogue, on a Jewish sabbath day, and sees a man with a shrivelled, useless hand (v10). He wants to do the man good (v12), even though it will stir up the Pharisees' anger. The man exercises faith and his hand is fully restored (v13). That's a sweet thing, but the Pharisees' bitterness and hatred grows (v14). Jesus has come to bring restoration, healing and to set people free (v15). He is the servant-King, the son of David, who brings redemption and was promised by God through Isaiah (v17). But Jesus isn't the kind of King people were expecting—there's no military fanfare (v16) or ruling by brute force. This is God's beloved servant and Son, anointed by the Holy Spirit (v18), gentle and humble (v20), who will set things right on a universal scale (v18, v21). The gentleness of Jesus, the King of everything, is stunningly beautiful. This is the gentleness of God. *In what ways does Jesus overturn our wrong ideas about God? What does that mean for you?*

The question Jesus asks this morning through his word to us here is: *"Are you with me?"* (v30). There's no neutral ground. To be unmoved by Jesus is not yet to have tasted the sweetness of his love. If you would like to, go to him and ask him for that simply and personally.

2) Jesus is King (12v22-32)

Jesus is the promised servant-King of Isaiah who opens blind eyes and frees prisoners from darkness (Isaiah 42v6-7). The King and his kingdom have arrived (v28)! And that's exactly what this King, Jesus, does in Matthew 12v22. Jesus teaches us here to take the kingdom of Satan seriously—the spiritual realm is very real, both the Kingdom of God and the spiritual forces of evil. Jesus is gentle & kind, and powerful (v29), and so he frees the demon-possessed man (v22). The Pharisees again call sweet bitter, and good evil (v24), attributing this work of Jesus by the Spirit of God (v28) to the work of Satan (v24-26)! Jesus sternly warns them they are in grave danger.

Outright opposition towards the Holy Spirit and his work (calling his grace evil, and speaking against the Spirit) risks blaspheming the Spirit of God and going beyond the point of no return (v31-32; see also Hebrews 6v4-8 & 10v26-31). (If, today, you want to be with Jesus and learn more of his gentleness and restoration, you have no need to worry you may have committed this sin in the past). To oppose the Spirit of Christ is to oppose Christ and so to oppose God.

How can we make sure that we do not reject the Spirit of God and his work because he doesn't always work in the way we quite expect or because our existing understanding is stretched? He brings the Kingdom of God near to us. He brings the gentleness, kindness and freeing power of Jesus into our lives. If we know Jesus, we can trust the Spirit of Jesus. We love and worship the Holy Spirit together with the Father and the Son. *Do we want to resolve never to call something bitter when the spiritual reality is sweet and draws us nearer to Jesus? Are we available for the sovereign Spirit of grace to move among us at Abbey in this season however he wants to do?*

