

Kehilat Sar Shalom and Beth Yeshua Bar and Bat Mitzvah

Lesson 28 Read Matthew 12:30-43

“He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters. And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come. 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. You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.”
Matthew 12:30-37

Yeshua, in this passage, points out the absolute difference between His Kingdom and the world in which we live. Yeshua is telling us that there is no middle ground. You cannot be a part-time resident of the Kingdom because everything you do has a consequence – either for good or for evil.

He then goes on to speak about blasphemy against (to curse or to desecrate) the Holy Spirit because those who are speaking to Yeshua in Matthew chapter 12 have slandered God by saying that His miracles were performed by the power of Satan.

Now, it is important that, in this passage, we realize that the title of Holy Spirit is being used as a general reference to God. When we think, in church terms, of the Holy Spirit and the manifestations of the Holy Spirit we tend to think in categories of supernatural phenomenon. But, Yeshua is reminding us of the third commandment:

“You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.”
Exodus 20:7

Yeshua builds off of this commandment to say that anyone who blasphemes God will not be held guiltless. Blasphemy and insult against man will be forgiven, but blasphemy against God will not. There will be some measure of judgment even in the world to come! We will have to give an account for every careless word we have spoken.

The truth is that all of us have spoken careless words in reference to the Creator. Most of us, if not all of us, have in some way taken God’s name in vain – a sin for which the Torah tells us we will be held accountable for. In the same way, it is likely that most of us have also misrepresented God – or sworn falsely concerning Him. Because of this, we are completely dependent upon the mercy of the King – we are completely dependent upon the redemptive work of Yeshua...and He will forgive. But, Yeshua’s mercy towards us is not an excuse for us to use careless words. In trying to be like our Teacher, we should exercise caution with every word that we say.

“Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, ‘Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you.’ He answered, ‘A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. 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.’”
Matthew 12:38-40

Kehilat Sar Shalom and Beth Yeshua Bar and Bat Mitzvah

The sign of Jonah is a reference to the miracle of the Resurrection – one of the true signs of the Kingdom of Heaven. Yeshua performed miraculous signs. He even resurrected the dead. These miracles served to establish the validity of His ministry and the extent of His authority, but the true hope of the Kingdom is the Resurrection into an immortal body. That is the reference that is made here. Yeshua did prove the true hope of the Kingdom and His right to the crown when in three days after His death He was given an immortal body. The validity of the entire Gospel hangs upon the Resurrection of Yeshua. And, the sign of Jonah is the Resurrection of Yeshua.

“The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here. The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon’s wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here.”
Matthew 12:41-42

Jewish literature speaks of the last generation before the destruction of Jerusalem as a “wicked and adulterous” generation. The rabbis point to the hatred of that day which erupted in slander and murder. Josephus confirms Yeshua’s sentiments as well. Political and religious corruption had brought about a social decay where murder was common and adultery was celebrated. It was for such things that Yochanan called for repentance and found himself in prison. Even the wicked Assyrian pagans of Nineveh repented when Jonah preached to them. Even the pagan Queen of Sheba repented when she heard Solomon’s wisdom...but not the generation before the destruction of Jerusalem.

“When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, ‘I will return to the house I left.’ When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first. That is how it will be with this wicked generation.” Matthew 12:43-45

The parable of the evil spirit that goes out only to return with seven more spirits worse than itself can be seen in any form of sinful behavior. If one breaks a destructive behavior a return to that behavior usually results even more abuse than before. The final condition of that man is worse than where he started. Yeshua compares the generation of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple to such a person. Although they have responded in mass numbers to John’s call to repentance and although great multitudes are following Yeshua as He teaches, He sees that, in the coming years, they will return to their sinful ways once more. And, history proves His prediction out.

When one sins and feels sorrowful for that sin but later returns to that same sin there is a hardening of the heart that takes place. The heart becomes calloused. The next time one commits that sin there is less of a feeling of sorrow and soon, if the behavior persists, there is no sorrow at all. When this happens the possibility of again being brought to repentance is small and so, with each successive return to a forbidden behavior, the condition for that person becomes worse. This is what Yeshua is referring to in Matthew. There is no middle ground in the Kingdom of Heaven – you are either working for the Kingdom or you are working for another. The gift of salvation that Yeshua has given to us, with all of its benefits, is something to be cherished and guarded and not taken lightly. If we do not cherish and guard it, we may become habitual sinners who only profess to be followers of Yeshua. And, this is another way God’s name is blasphemed.

Next week – chapter 13.

Kehilat Sar Shalom and Beth Yeshua Bar and Bat Mitzvah

Questions from this week's Reading and Lesson #28

1. What is blasphemy?
2. Write out the commandment that Yeshua refers to when He speaks about blaspheming the Holy Spirit?
3. Explain why it is important to be careful about every word that we say.
4. What is the "sign of Jonah"?
5. According to Yeshua, what were the reasons for the destruction of Jerusalem during the time of "this generation"?
6. What did Yeshua call "this generation" and whom did He contrast it to?
7. Explain the lesson that is taught by the parable of the evil spirit.
8. Why should we guard and cherish the gift of salvation that Yeshua has given to us?