

## The Unforgivable Sin 11-7-04

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Matthew 12:22-32 (NIV)

*22 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. 23 All the people were astonished and said, "Could this be the Son of David?" 24 But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, "It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons." 25 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. 26 If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? 27 And if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your people drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. 28 But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. 29 "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 rob his house. 30 "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters. 31 And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. 32 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.*

In our passage today, we will see a confrontation of the Light and darkness. The enemies of Christ will make accusations and Jesus will answer by the Spirit of God. Keep in mind that in the last passage, Jesus revealed the importance of man in creation. The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. (Mark 2:27) The Sabbath ritual rules were for man's refreshment, not to burden man, but to help bring him out from under the burden of the workweek. (Exodus 23:12) Jesus revealed Himself as the Lord of the Sabbath, (Matthew 12:8) as One greater than the physical Temple (Matthew 12:6), and as our Sabbath rest (Hebrews 4:9-10). In spite of His Scriptural exhortation and quote from the prophets, His healing on the Sabbath provoked the religious leaders to plot to murder Him. (Matthew 12:14)

Matthew implies that the passage today followed that Sabbath confrontation. Jesus seemed to live in constant confrontation during His ministry. (John 7:43) Wherever the light shines, it will be in conflict with the darkness. (John 1:5) Confrontation is inevitable and usually results in healthy positive changes. Some would avoid confrontation at all costs. Jesus only avoided it when it would not be productive or instructive. He never confronted for the sake of confrontation, but to help and instruct others at His Father's direction. These confrontations with the Pharisees are to shake them out of their rigid and misguided interpretations and reveal the Spirit of the Law. (John 3:10; Matthew 22:29)

*22 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.*

The people brought a man in a pretty hopeless condition. He was blind. He couldn't speak, and he was possessed by a demon. People like this in third world cultures are usually chained up somewhere so that they don't bother people. Charitable folks or

**Commented [notes1]:** <sup>27</sup> Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. Mark 2:27 (NIV)

**Commented [notes2]:** <sup>12</sup> Six days thou shalt do thy work, and on the seventh day thou shalt rest: that thine ox and thine ass may rest, and the son of thy handmaid, and the stranger, may be refreshed. Exodus 23:12 (KJV)

**Commented [notes3]:** <sup>8</sup> For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath." Matthew 12:8 (NIV)

**Commented [notes4]:** <sup>6</sup> I tell you that one greater than the temple is here. Matthew 12:6 (NIV)

**Commented [notes5]:** <sup>9</sup> There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; <sup>10</sup> for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Hebrews 4:9-10 (NIV)

**Commented [notes6]:** <sup>14</sup> But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus. Matthew 12:14 (NIV)

**Commented [notes7]:** <sup>43</sup> Thus the people were divided because of Jesus. John 7:43 (NIV)

**Commented [notes8]:** <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. John 1:5 (NIV)

**Commented [notes9]:** <sup>10</sup> "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? John 3:10 (NIV)

**Commented [notes10]:** <sup>29</sup> Jesus replied, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. Matthew 22:29 (NIV)

family bring them food and water. They are treated pretty much like an animal. Someone must have had the bright idea to see if Jesus could do anything with this hopeless man. He had healed everyone that was brought to Him, could He even heal a man like this? (Matthew 12:15)

Is anything too difficult for God? (Jeremiah 32:27) Whether we realize it or not, we are not so different from this hopeless man. When we have the world as our goal, when our thoughts and leanings are formed by our old nature, we are possessed with worldliness, selfishness, and greed. (Ephesians 5:5) Is that any worse than the demon possession of this man? In that condition we can't really see. (Isaiah 56:10) We are blind to the work of God all around us, to His great love for us, and to His glory in all the earth. We cannot speak a word of truth in the power of the Spirit. Our words affect nothing for good, but only for evil. Without Christ, we are possessed with self-concern, blind to God and can say nothing of value, and not much different from a beast chained to our desires. It really doesn't take much effort to relate to nearly anyone in the Bible. Before we were born again, people probably thought we were pretty hopeless, but a flicker of hope rose in their heart. "Let's bring him or her to Jesus and see what He can do with them." And in prayer, they brought us to the Lord and continued to pray for us. Suddenly, there we were before Jesus, freed, able to see life as it really is, and able to speak praise to God. (Isaiah 61:1)

Do you know some possessed, blind and mute person, a hopeless case? Surely you do. I know dozens that I would never think would come to Christ. Why not take them to Jesus in prayer? Do you think they are any more difficult than this man, or than us? The problem is not in Jesus' power, (John 6:37) but in the lack of people that will be concerned enough, believing enough, to take them to Jesus. Who is coming to mind? Whoever it is, take them to Jesus in prayer. Take them to Jesus by speaking to them of the Gospel, or by sharing your testimony, and by praying for them, and see what He can do. (Psalms 146:8)

<sup>23</sup> *All the people were astonished and said, "Could this be the Son of David?"* The word "astonished" doesn't really do the Greek justice. *One writer suggests that "it means to be literally knocked out of your senses," and another that "it means to be out of your mind with amazement.—MacArthur New Testament Commentary,* The fact that Jesus could deal with this most desperate of cases caused them to wonder if Jesus was the Messiah. That is the implication in the term, Son of David. In their minds, the question was whether or not this man Jesus, was the promised heir to the throne of David, who would vanquish their enemies and set up an eternal Kingdom. (Isaiah 9:7) When you see this title, you can be fairly certain they are thinking in a nationalistic sense. He still touches the desperate today, and the testimonies of some of the worst who were transformed by the power of God, still cause people to wonder if Jesus is the Savior.

<sup>24</sup> *But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, "It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons."* Here they go again, confusing the people with their attempts to turn them from truth back to the darkness. (Luke 6:39) They had to make some dark excuse for the compassionate power of this Man Whom they had decided was their rival for

**Commented [notes11]:** <sup>15</sup> Aware of this, Jesus withdrew from that place. Many followed him, and he healed all their sick, Matthew 12:15 (NIV)

**Commented [notes12]:** <sup>27</sup> "I am the LORD, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me? Jeremiah 32:27 (NIV)

**Commented [notes13]:** <sup>5</sup> For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person--such a man is an idolater--has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Ephesians 5:5 (NIV)

**Commented [notes14]:** <sup>10</sup> His watchmen are blind: they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber. Isaiah 56:10 (KJV)

**Commented [notes15]:** <sup>1</sup> The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, Isaiah 61:1 (NIV)

**Commented [notes16]:** <sup>37</sup> All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. John 6:37 (KJV)

**Commented [notes17]:** <sup>8</sup> The LORD openeth the eyes of the blind: the LORD raiseth them that are bowed down: the LORD loveth the righteous: Psalms 146:8 (KJV)

**Commented [notes18]:** <sup>7</sup> Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this. Isaiah 9:7 (NIV)

**Commented [notes19]:** <sup>39</sup> He also told them this parable: "Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit? Luke 6:39 (NIV)

authority and prestige. (Matthew 27:18) They claimed that He is working by the power of the prince of demons. They are attributing His power to Lucifer! Jesus declared that it was Lucifer that came to steal, kill and destroy. (John 10:10) Jesus' ministry is restoring what was stolen, raising the dead, and creating new life.

*25 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. 26 If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? 27 And if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your people drive them out? So then, they will be your judges.*

Sometimes Jesus used Scripture. Sometimes He uses simple and clear logic. When any organization has a civil war, that system is on its way to destruction. It doesn't matter if it is a kingdom, a city, a home or a church. Once two factions begin fighting for power, the structure will soon collapse. That is quite a warning for churches. That is why Jesus prayed for us to be in unity. (John 17:11) We can agree to disagree, but when we start warring against one another, we are doomed. (Galatians 5:15)

Jesus was saying that if He was empowered by Lucifer to throw out demons, the whole demonic world was in upheaval and ready to collapse. The accusations against Him were nonsense! Apparently some of the Pharisees or their disciples also drove out demons, so where did the accusation leave them?

Then Jesus led them to one more logical conclusion.

*28 But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.* If it was the Spirit of God through Jesus that was driving out the demons, then the kingdom had come. The kingdom is where the King rules. If the King was commanding demons to take a hike, the Kingdom was present because the sovereign King was present. At that moment they should have fallen to their knees and repented, but most of them hardened their hearts even more. (Proverbs 28:14)

The kingdom of God has come to you too. When you meet people whose lives are under the reign of the King, you have come in contact with the kingdom. When you see selfishness defeated and generosity and love manifested from an unselfish heart, you have come in contact with the kingdom. When you see people healed by prayer you're seeing the kingdom at work. What will you do when you recognize the kingdom has come in the lives of believers? It should challenge us to be more submitted to our King, surrendered to His will and plan for our lives. But let us never be like these religious frauds that upon coming in contact with the kingdom, made excuses to harden their hearts.

*29 "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 rob his house.* In case they didn't get it, He gave them another illustration. If someone wants to rob a strong man's home, he has to first deal with the strong man. The strong man is the demon. He has claimed the person and all his faculties as his home. If you want to give the man back the possession of his faculties, you first have to tie up that demon. You can't set the man free without overpowering the demon.

**Commented [notes20]:** <sup>18</sup> For he knew that for envy they had delivered him.  
Matthew 27:18 (KJV)

**Commented [notes21]:** <sup>10</sup> The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.  
John 10:10 (NIV)

**Commented [notes22]:** <sup>11</sup> I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name--the name you gave me--so that they may be one as we are one.  
John 17:11 (NIV)

**Commented [notes23]:** <sup>15</sup> If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.  
Galatians 5:15 (NIV)

**Commented [notes24]:** <sup>14</sup> Blessed is the man who always fears the LORD, but he who hardens his heart falls into trouble.  
Proverbs 28:14 (NIV)

In a larger sense, Jesus was saying, "Look, aren't my works a demonstration of overpowering the darkness? How can I heal every sickness, raise the dead, and cast out demons unless I have overpowered Satan, and how can that be possible unless I am God?" Jesus' ministry was a demonstration of God overcoming every form of evil. Only by hardening their hearts and refusing to see this truth could they make the claim that He was in league with evil. In trying to trick Him they sent spies and told them to say, "Teacher, we know that you speak and teach what is right, and that you do not show partiality but teach the way of God in accordance with the truth." Luke 20:21 (NIV) Their words will haunt them.

<sup>30</sup> "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters. You are working with Jesus or against Him. Jesus didn't believe in middle ground, as we have seen many times before. The Pharisees were not with Jesus, so their words were scattering the sheep. Those who are with Him speak words that gather the sheep together. Jesus made a similar statement in Mark, "for whoever is not against us is for us." Mark 9:40 (NIV) You can't be in between. Are you gathering or scattering? Does your life and conversation gather or scatter? The person in question in the Mark passage was casting out demons. It may have been those Jesus was referring to when He told the Pharisees that their own people would judge them. They weren't just unopposed to Jesus, they were actively doing something to advance the Kingdom of God and resist evil in Jesus' name. It isn't enough to just be "not against" Jesus. You must be actively engaged for Him in some way. If only denominations could grab hold of the truth Jesus was teaching here! You may not be in the same group, but if you are actively working for Jesus in opposition to evil, you are on the same team.

<sup>31</sup> And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. <sup>32</sup> 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.

This is one of the most debated passages in Scripture, but when we see it in the context of the passage, the meaning seems clear to me. What was Jesus talking about? He is talking of people who have set themselves against His Spirit. The Pharisees called His work the power of evil. Jesus' clear explanations of the fallacies in their accusation gave the Holy Spirit an opportunity to convict and challenge their stance. In the previous passage Jesus had shared examples from Scripture and a quote from the prophets. (Matthew 12:7) All this evidence opened a door for the Holy Spirit to convict their hearts. Labeling healing as evil was about as hard hearted as a person can get. To call the One who delivers a person from possession, "the instrument of Lucifer", is not only twisted logic but also is a hardened heart. Their response to the conviction of the Holy Spirit was to harden their hearts and reject His gentle conviction. Jesus was saying something like this. "You can be offended by my style, but to slander the Holy Spirit will land you in hell!"

Remember when we talked about John the Baptist wondering about Jesus, if He was really the Messiah? John seems to have been offended by how different Jesus' style was from the style the Holy Spirit had directed him. (Matthew 11:2-3) That is not a problem. Jesus sent back Scripture to help him in his weakness there in that

**Commented [notes25]:** <sup>7</sup> If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent. Matthew 12:7 (NIV)

**Commented [notes26]:** <sup>2</sup> When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples <sup>3</sup> to ask him, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" Matthew 11:2-3 (NIV)

dungeon, and apparently he received it. The Pharisees have an entirely different heart in regards to Jesus. They don't just dislike His ways; they are angry with, and antagonistic toward, the Holy Spirit. (Acts 7:51) When confronted with the truth, they don't care. They want their position and the esteem of men. They will call good evil and evil good. (Isaiah 5:20) They will mislead those who are seeking truth just to save their own image. (Matthew 23:15)

People often ask, "What is the unforgivable sin?" It is slandering the Holy Spirit. It is a continual and increasing hardening of your heart toward Him. You can be forgiven the sin of slandering any human, even the humanity of Jesus. But when the Holy Spirit woos your heart to repent and accept Christ as your Savior, if you call that the work of evil, or stupidity only for the weak, or some other slanderous remark, you are on your way to judgment. (John 16:8-11) If you are here this morning, and the Holy Spirit is drawing you to accept Jesus as the Lord of your life, if you have come in contact with the kingdom, if the Holy Spirit of God is encouraging you to acknowledge that you have offended God by the way you have run your life, and that you need to give yourself to your Creator, you might get away with putting off the decision, but don't call that work in your heart evil. It is the grace of God that the Holy Spirit has broken through your defenses and given you recognition of your need. It is God's mercy. Never mock that. Never slander Him. (Revelation 13:6)

I think many of you are probably relieved to know you haven't committed the unpardonable sin. Just the fact that you ask that question means you aren't too far down that road. You see, by asking, you show sensitivity to the Spirit of God and a desire to know the truth. But we should also realize how important it is to heed the Spirit when He works in our hearts each day. (Galatians 5:16) We need to ask God for hearing ears and an obedient heart so that we can heed the Spirit moment by moment. Most of us are not being willfully defiant by slandering the Holy Spirit, but many of us can and do ignore His gentle pleadings in our life each day. We can do it by just not taking time to hear Him. If we don't hear, we don't have to change our plans and can continue on our own way. In doing that, we slowly extinguish the fire He has put in our heart. (1 Thessalonians 5:19)

We must be very practical about dealing with our old nature and allowing the life of Christ to come to the fore. Peter said that we make every effort to see that the qualities of Christ increase in us. (2 Peter 1:5-8) If we don't get down to the practical disciplines of spiritual life, the old nature will dominate us. If you want that sensitivity to the Holy Spirit that is the antithesis of blaspheming the Spirit, then you fan the flame in you by taking time for the Word and prayer. Pray for an open ear and sensitivity to the Spirit so that throughout the day we would hear the direction of the Spirit. All of us to some extent are possessed, blind, and mute, but the life of the Spirit in us can set us free from the old nature, help us see God at work in us and the world around us, and give us a voice that will touch lives for the kingdom of God. Let us close with a prayer for this to be an increasing part of our lives.

**Commented [notes27]:** <sup>51</sup> "You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Acts 7:51 (NIV)

**Commented [notes28]:** <sup>20</sup> Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Isaiah 5:20 (KJV)

**Commented [notes29]:** <sup>15</sup> "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are. Matthew 23:15 (NIV)

**Commented [notes30]:** <sup>8</sup> When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: <sup>9</sup> in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; <sup>10</sup> in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; <sup>11</sup> and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned. John 16:8-11 (NIV)

**Commented [notes31]:** <sup>6</sup> He opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. Revelation 13:6 (NIV)

**Commented [notes32]:** <sup>16</sup> So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. Galatians 5:16 (NIV)

**Commented [notes33]:** <sup>19</sup> Do not put out the Spirit's fire; 1 Thessalonians 5:19 (NIV)

**Commented [notes34]:** <sup>5</sup> For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; <sup>6</sup> and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; <sup>7</sup> and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. <sup>8</sup> For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 1:5-8 (NIV)