

Text: Mark 3:20-35¹

Title: "Is there a sin Jesus can't forgive?"

Date: September 3, 2017

Place: First Baptist Church, Olds, AB

This morning, as we prepare for the Lord's Table later in the service, I'd like us to consider a very important spiritual question. Here it is:

Is there a sin Jesus can't forgive?

Turn in your Bible to Mark's Gospel, chapter three. We're going to read from verse 20 to the end of the chapter. This is God's holy, inspired and authoritative Word.

20 Then he went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. 21 And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, "He is out of his mind."

22 And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "by the prince of demons he casts out the demons." 23 And he called them to him and said to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? 24 If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25 And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. 26 And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end. 27 But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house."

28 "Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, 29 but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin"— 30 for they were saying, "He has an unclean spirit."

31 And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. 32 And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you." 33 And he answered them, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" 34 And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! 35 For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother."

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“He is out of his mind.” Mark 3:21
“He is possessed by Beelzebul,” Mark 3:22

Imagine being hit with these kinds of accusations one after another. This was not shaping up to be a great day for Jesus. Jesus might expect these kinds of thing from his enemies, the Pharisees and religious leaders, but from his own family, too? That hurt!

For many of us, this kind of misunderstanding and hostility would be enough to drive us to either lash out in anger or retreat in despair, but Jesus did neither of those things. This passage, with its statement about sins against the Holy Spirit that won't be forgiven, might sound harsh and cold at first reading. But instead, what I see in this episode is overwhelming evidence of the amazing grace of Jesus.

Let me explain.

First of all, I want us to see that...

Jesus showed grace to his family

Jesus' family had become concerned about him. He was preaching here and there gathering great crowds; he was pressured by great crowds of the sick and demonized, seeking relief; he was being hunted by the religious authorities who were determined to kill him (3:6); and all this activity was keeping him from eating on a regular basis (3:20). Mark tells us that when his family heard about his situation, “they went out to seize him, for they were saying,

“He is out of his mind.” Mark 3:21

To some extent, I'm sure that their concern was motivated by their love for him and their concern for his welfare. But their charge that his activity demonstrated that he was “out of his mind” tells us that they just didn't know who Jesus really was. To his brothers, James, Joses, Judas and Simon (Mark 6:3), Jesus' identity as the Son of God was still hidden – they simply thought of him as their brother, the son of their mother Mary and father Joseph.

What an awful thing to say about Jesus! “Jesus, you are mentally unbalanced. Everything you've said and done is idiocy.” Jesus could have responded by retreating in woundedness and despair, but he didn't.

How did Jesus handle their failure to understand his true identity? When his family came to “seize him,” someone told him that his mother and brothers were outside looking for him.

"And he answered them, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother." Mark 3:33-35

During the years of Jesus ministry, the Apostle John tells us that **“not even his own brothers believed in him.” (John 7:5)** His brothers were lost people! Even though they were related to Him by birth, they were strangers to Him by faith. But somehow, somewhere, sometime before the giving of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, Jesus’ brothers came to faith in Him. They became members of God’s family.

After his resurrection, Jesus told his disciples to gather in a room in the city of Jerusalem and await the gift of the Holy Spirit from heaven. Luke tells us:

"All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers." Acts 1:14

One brother, James, eventually became a key leader in the church in Jerusalem and wrote the New Testament book that bears his name. We’re not told how Jesus’ brothers came to faith in Him but the fact that they did bears witness to the relentless grace of Jesus – even though they thought him a madman, Jesus never turned his back on them! When they turned to God in faith, Jesus welcomed them into his forever family by his grace and mercy.

As disappointing as it must have been to Jesus that his family didn’t understand who he was at this early point in his ministry, Jesus understood that his real family was the family of those who did the will of God. His real family was the family of God, and eventually, Mary and his brothers came to become part of that family by faith.

Several years ago I worked in Toronto for a ministry called “Jews for Jesus.” I worked in the office to provide administrative support to the missionaries of this ministry whose focus was to reach the Jewish people of Toronto with the message that Jesus is their Messiah. The missionaries of that mission are all Jewish believers in Jesus and many of them could tell us stories of rejection by their families because of their faith in Christ. The family of the man I worked for, Steve, had actually had a funeral for him when he became a follower of Jesus. Steve was dead to them, as far as there were concerned. It hurt Steve, but Steve held on to the truth of God’s Word that his real family was made up of those who did the will of God. Steve continued to pray that his family would come to understand that Jesus was their Messiah and he prayed that one day

they would be reunited as a family within the family of God. He continued to extend grace to them. I don't know the end of his story.

For many years, one of Ruth's sisters lived in rebellion against the faith of her parents. It took the death of Ruth's mother to jolt her from her rebellion against the Lord and bring her to faith in Christ. In fact, it was the Sunday following the funeral of Ruth's mother that Ruth's sister finally became a follower of Jesus. Even though she had rebelled against her Lord, Ruth's mom continued to pray for her and love her and show grace to her. She never saw her daughter's repentance and faith, but it was her testimony to the Lord's love and mercy that softened the heart of her daughter and prepared the way for her to turn to Jesus.

Do you have family members who think you're faith in Jesus is foolishness? Do they mock you for it? Do they accuse you of all kinds of false things? It hurts, doesn't it? Let me encourage you with the simple truth that Jesus knows exactly how you feel because He's been in your situation. And let me challenge you to keep on extending the grace of Jesus to them. Pray for them. Live in hope that they will come to faith in Jesus, even if it might be after you're gone to be with the Lord. But if they do, you'll be united with them as God's family forever.

Jesus demonstrated grace to his family.

Second, I want us to see that...

Jesus showed grace to his enemies

“He is possessed by Beelzebul” Mark 3:22

Matthew tells us the circumstance behind this accusation against Jesus...

"Then a demon-oppressed man who was blind and mute was brought to him, and he healed him, so that the man spoke and saw. And all the people were amazed, and said, "Can this be the Son of David?" But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons." Matthew 12:22-24

What an awful thing to say about Jesus! "Jesus, you have a demon. Everything you do is evil!" Jesus could have lashed out in anger and obliterated his enemies by his power, but he didn't. He showed them grace.

First of all,

***Jesus showed grace to his enemies
...by reasoning with them***

"And he called them to him and said to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan?" Mark 3:23

A parable is "a story set alongside a teaching to help us understand its meaning." (Warren Wiersbe, Be Diligent, p. 38) A parable is designed to make us think and bring us to a point of decision about something. Jesus used parables to get people to think more deeply about the things he was doing and the saying. In other words, Jesus reached out to these religious leaders and offered them a chance to get to know him.

Warren Wiersbe wrote that "a parable begins innocently as **a picture** that arrests our attention and arouses our interest. But as you study the picture, it becomes **a mirror** in which we suddenly see ourselves. If we continue to look by faith, the mirror becomes **a window** through which we see God and His truth. How we respond to that truth will determine what further truth God will teach us." (Wiersbe, Be Diligent, p. 38)

Jesus asks his opponents to consider Satan's work from two perspectives, both of which were related to warfare.

First of all, Jesus made an analogy to the strategic aspect of warfare. He asked them,

"Is it reasonable to believe that Satan is at war with himself?"

"How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end." Mark 3:23-26

If people were being delivered from evil spirits by Satan himself, then his kingdom could not last. He was defeating himself. But as people looked around them, it was evident that Satan was still having a powerful effect in the lives of people – his kingdom was not collapsing in on itself.

In other words, is it reasonable to believe that Satan is involved in a civil war? The answer Jesus is looking for from them is, "No."

Second, Jesus made an analogy to what we would call "home invasion." In warfare, "to the victor go the spoils" and so Jesus asked them,

"Isn't it more reasonable to believe that Satan is subject to someone else, someone stronger than he is?"

"But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house."

Mark 3:27

Jesus refers to Satan as “the strong man.” He refers to demonized people as Satan’s “goods.” He refers to Satan’s kingdom as his “house” and he pictures himself as a thief who has come to rob Satan’s house. He pictures his work of delivering people from bondage to evil spirits as robbing Satan’s house.

Jesus had been setting all kinds of people free from the power of evil spirits and often it had been clear that these evil spirits had a strong control over the person they were oppressing.

When Jesus had delivered a man from an evil spirit in the synagogue of Capernaum, Mark tells us that,

"the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him." Mark 1:26

That spirit didn’t want to let that man go, but because of who Jesus was, he was forced to release him! When Jesus was casting out evil spirits around the Sea of Galilee, Mark tells us that

"whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, “You are the Son of God.” Mark 3:11

The people who witnessed these deliverance events were amazed that Jesus

"commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." Mark 1:27

There was clearly a contest of power between Jesus and the spirits and the spirits recognized Jesus power and authority over them.

Jesus called Satan, “the strong man.” The Greek word is *ischuros*. When John the Baptist had predicted the coming of Jesus, he had said...

“After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” Mark 1:7-8

The Greek word translated as “he who is mightier” is the word *ischuroteros* – it literally means, “the *stronger* man.”

Based on the evidence of these confrontations that these peoples had witnessed, Jesus argued, "isn't it more reasonable to believe that Satan is involved in a war, a war with me for the control of the souls of mankind? And isn't it more reasonable to believe," Jesus was asking them, "that I am stronger than the “strong man”?" The answer he was looking for from the religious leaders was “yes.”

Parables are first **pictures** that get our attention, then **mirrors** in which we see ourselves, then **windows** through which we see truth about God. Let me ask you: as you look at these parables of Jesus, do you see yourself in them as someone who has been set free by the Stronger One? Have you been delivered from Satan's house and brought into the kingdom of the Son of God?

Jesus wants to engage you in discussion. He wants you to see him as your Deliverer from sin and Satan. Will you reason with him?

"Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool." Isaiah 1:18

Second,

***Jesus showed grace to his enemies
...by offering them forgiveness***

"Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter," Mark 3:28

This declaration is surprising coming in the midst of a defense by Jesus of his ministry. To men who were accusing him of vile things, Jesus offers a word of sweeping mercy!

The offer of forgiveness is sweeping! It literally reads...

"Truly I say to you, all things will be forgiven to the sons of men, the sins and the blasphemies by which they blaspheme."

Everything will be forgiven! Jesus used two terms to describe what will be forgiven. "Sins" are violations of God's law directed at people. "Blasphemies" are attacks directed at God and his character. Blasphemy is an expression of defiant hostility toward God. That pretty well covers everything! The amazing thing about Jesus sweeping declaration of forgiveness is that it touched exactly upon the sin his accusers were committing without even knowing it. They were standing before the "Holy One of God" (Mark 1:24) and accusing him of being evil – that is the ultimate blasphemy! By rights, he could have called down fire from heaven to consume them, but instead he offers them sweeping forgiveness.

All that they needed to do was to repent of their blasphemy. The message in Mark's Gospel is clear from the beginning.

"John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." Mark 1:4

"Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." Mark 1:14-15

Forgiveness comes to those who repent of their sin. "Repent" means to acknowledge our rebellion and to turn from it and follow God's way. Jesus' offer of forgiveness is breathtaking in its scope. Everything will be forgiven to those who repent and turn to Him!

A few years ago I was watching a hockey game between Ottawa and Toronto. Ottawa won that game 8 to nothing! Four of the goals that were scored that night came from a man whose presence on the ice that night was the result of a breathtaking, sweeping forgiveness. Dany Heatley scored four goals for Ottawa that night because the parents of Dan Snyder forgave him for his role in their son's death.

Heatley and Snyder were riding in Heatley's car about 2 years prior when Heatley slammed into a brick wall and Snyder suffered head injuries which caused his death. Heatley was found responsible for Snyder's death. While Heatley was in hospital, recovering from his injuries, Mrs Snyder visited him. All Heatley could say was, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry." Mrs Snyder just gently put her hand over his mouth and whispered to him, "Nothing to be sorry for." Even though Heatley faced charges for his role in Snyder's death, the Snyders said he had suffered enough and should be allowed to get on with his life and career.

The Snyders are Christians. "You just can't heal with bitterness," Mrs Snyder told the Calgary Herald. "If you have forgiveness, compassion in your heart, then you can heal. I know we will never get over it, I won't deny that. But I know that bitter, bitter, bitter will never make you feel better." (as reported in Today's Family News, July 27, 2004, a FamilyFacts.ca publication)

Their forgiveness is breathtaking. But how much more is the overwhelming, sweeping forgiveness of God toward us. All these religious leaders had to do was turn to Jesus and repent of their accusation against him and accept him as the Stronger One of God who had come to set them free from their sin and their rebellion. God would sweep away all their blasphemy and their sin against His Son.

But that was the problem. Would they repent of their attitudes? Would they change their minds about him?

The offer is the same for you and me. Will we repent of our rebellion against God? Will we accept the fact that we are sinners and blasphemers who need to be forgiven? Will we "repent and believe that good news" about Jesus, the Son of God who died to pay the penalty for our sins and set us free?

Third,

***Jesus showed grace to his enemies
...by warning them of their spiritual danger***

"but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin"— for they were saying, “He has an unclean spirit.” Mark 3:29-30

Several years ago, when I serving as a pastor in Coaldale, a man came to see me. He was from another church in town and wanted to share with me his views on the “unpardonable sin.” He was actually going from church to church in town explaining his views on the matter.

What motivated him to do that I’m not clear about. I don’t remember his specific conclusions about the nature of the “unpardonable sin,” except to say that I remember thinking: “You’ve missed it, brother!” But as he left, I remember feeling sorry for him. He had spent a great deal of spiritual time and energy asking and answering two questions that obviously haunted him: “What is the unpardonable sin? And have I committed it?” And one thing I was sure of that day: he hadn’t committed it! The very fact that he was worried about it told me that.

What is the “eternal sin” Jesus warns about? What is the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit that cannot be forgiven?

I want you to notice that Mark answers the question in verse 30.

“for they were saying, “He has an unclean spirit.” Mark 3:30

There are two key elements in the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit that cuts us off from forgiveness.

First, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is a persistent, fixed rejection of Jesus, not just a momentary lapse into rebellion against God. The verb, “were saying,” describes a persistent, repeated, settled activity. The same verb is used back in verse 22. The teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem, “were saying” that Jesus is “possessed by Beelzebul.” They had set their hearts and minds against Jesus and their mouths gave testimony to their fixed attitudes.

Second, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is the belief that the good work of Jesus is evil. These men had seen Jesus free the demonized and heal the sick, all by the power of the Holy Spirit. But in their twisted, rebellious hearts they had chosen to reject the witness of their eyes and had **called Jesus’ good work evil.**

Their opposition to Jesus had begun when Jesus healed a paralyzed man. You'll find that story back at the beginning of chapter 2. When the man had been first brought to Jesus, the Lord had looked at him and, although he was paralyzed, Jesus had said, "Son, your sins are forgiven." (Mark 2:5) The teachers of the law watching this had accused Jesus of blasphemy against God for doing something only God could do – forgive sin! So to prove to them that he had the authority to forgive sins, Jesus then healed the man's paralysis.

"But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the paralytic— "I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home." Mark 2:10-11

The power of the Holy Spirit by which Jesus healed the man pointed to the authority of Jesus to forgive the man.

Here's the danger in which Jesus' opponents had placed themselves:

By condemning Jesus' power to heal and deliver they had shut themselves off from his authority to forgive.

The sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is the ongoing, continual rejection of the witness of the Holy Spirit to Jesus as God and Saviour.

Only the person who sets themselves against forgiveness is excluded from it!

Jesus words to these men were a **warning** of their final judgment, not the declaration of their final judgment. There was hope for these leaders, if they repented. But if they maintained their rejection of Jesus, there was no hope of forgiveness for them.

Kent Hughes tells the story of pastor by the name of Ben Haden. Pastor Haden was called to the hospital late one night to visit a man he had known for many years. The doctor told Pastor Haden that the man was dying and knew it, and so he asked him how things were between himself and the Lord.

"Oh," he said, "I've always believed in God, and I know everything is shipshape." "What do you believe about Jesus," Haden asked. "I've known God all my life," the man said, "and I've tried to observe godly standards. I've been honest in business and I've worked hard."

"My friend," said Pastor Haden, "can you answer a straight question: How is it between you and Jesus?" To which the man replied, "I've never made a place in my life for Jesus. I don't believe in Jesus. If I were to believe in Jesus, it would upset everything in my philosophy and my life, and I would have to rethink everything about me."

“By the grace of God,” Pastor Haden said, “you have that kind of time; rethink it.”

“No,” the man said, “I will die without Jesus.”

“Why then do you think Jesus died?” asked the pastor.

“Oh, I understand he died for sins.”

“Your sins,” said Haden.

“Perhaps, perhaps, but it’s too late in my life to rethink the place of Jesus.”

And he died, rejecting Christ. (as told in Kent Hughes, Mark, vol. 1, p. 92)

To my knowledge, there isn’t a single incident in the Bible where anyone who repented of their sin and asked God for forgiveness was ever denied it. Jesus said,

“Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter,” Mark 3:28

"All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out." John 6:37

And to God be the glory. Amen.

- *Invitation to the Lord's Table*
- *Songs of Communion*
 - Song for the Bread
 - Song for the Cup
- *Benediction*