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Sermon Summary #11

What is the Unforgivable Sin? Mark 3:22-30

“Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity” (Ps. 32:1-2a).

There is in the reality of divine forgiveness a healing for the human soul that passes comprehension. There is a refreshing and renewing power that can be found nowhere else. See Exodus 34:6-7a; Psalms 86:5; 103:2-3; Micah 7:18-19.

It is into the brilliant and blessed light of this truth concerning forgiveness that Mark 3:22-30 casts such a dark and depressing shadow.

This ominous declaration by Jesus **doesn't occur in a vacuum**. Something happened to provoke it. **See Matthew 12** where we are told that a man who was both blind and mute was brought to Jesus. Jesus proceeded to cast out the demon and heal the man. Instantly he could see and speak. The miracle was incontestable and beyond dispute. No one doubted that he was truly blind and mute.

There are **only two possible explanations** for what happened. Either his healing was the work of God or of the Devil. Since they refused to acknowledge that it was God, they had no other options than to conclude Jesus did it by the power of Satan himself.

Our Lord's response is profound. In essence he says, “Satan may be evil, but he's not stupid!” That is to say, any kingdom or house or city that develops internal strife will ultimately self-destruct. Satan's domain is no different.

Look again at v. 27 (Read). Satan is the “strong man”; his “house” or palace is this present world; and his “goods” or property are the men and women whom he holds in darkness and spiritual bondage. But with the coming of Jesus, someone stronger has appeared and has assailed and conquered him. Jesus has come to plunder Satan's kingdom by rescuing the men and women who have been held captive to do his will. With the coming of Jesus, the devil's power has been broken. His kingdom has been conquered. His captives have been set free.

Jesus “binds” Satan, the “strong man,” by virtue of his sinless life, his resistance to the temptation in the wilderness, his authoritative teaching in which truth prevails over falsehood, and ultimately by virtue of his death, resurrection, and exaltation to the right hand of the Father.

I first need to explain **what the unforgiveable or unpardonable sin is not**. It is not: *murder, adultery, suicide, homosexuality, cursing God or taking his name in vain, divorce, lying, child molestation, etc.* Jesus is clear: all such sins and blasphemies will be forgiven.

What is the Unforgiveable Sin?

It is **blasphemy against the Holy Spirit!**

Why was their sin against the HS and not against Jesus? Because it was by the power of the HS that Jesus performed his healings and miracles (Matthew 12:28).

What the religious leaders were saying is: **“Jesus, we don't deny that a great healing miracle has occurred. We don't deny that you cast out a demon from that man. But the power by which you did it was the power of Satan.”**

Thus their sin was attributing to the Devil what the Spirit did. They didn't deny the existence of the supernatural. They didn't deny the reality of the miracle. They simply said, in a remarkable display of hardness of heart and spiritual blindness: the Devil enabled and empowered you to do it.

But **why** was this regarded by Jesus as so heinous of a sin that it was beyond forgiveness. Why was this blasphemy of the HS and his work so horrible, so reprehensible, so utterly outrageous that forgiveness becomes impossible?

The answer is found in the relationship between Jesus and the religious leaders and how they responded to him. Their repudiation of Jesus was **not** the result of ignorance or lack of evidence. Blasphemy of the HS is willful, wide-eyed slandering of the work of the HS, attributing to the devil what was undeniably divine. These people had seen as clearly as anyone could see and understood as lucidly as anyone could understand that Jesus performed his miracles by the power of the HS. Yet they defiantly insisted, contrary to what they knew to be true, that it was Satan who empowered him.

This was not a one-time, momentary slip or inadvertent mistake in judgment. This was a persistent, life-long rebellion in the face of inescapable and undeniable truth.

Blasphemy of the HS is not a careless act committed only once in a moment of rage or rebellion, but a calloused attitude over time; a persistent defiance that hardens and calcifies the heart.

The **Pharisees** watched as Jesus healed the sick, cleansed the lepers, raised the dead, gave sight to the blind, and drove out demons. Notwithstanding all this, they openly and persistently and angrily and arrogantly declared that he did it all by the power of the Devil!

Blasphemy of the HS, therefore, is **not just unbelief**; the sort of unbelief or rejection or doubt that is so typical in our world. This is defiance of what one knows beyond any shadow of doubt to be true. It is not mere denial, but determined denial; not mere rejection but wanton, willful, wicked, wide-eyed rejection.

This sin, therefore, **isn't unforgivable because** there is a defect in the atoning death of Jesus or because there is a limit to God's grace and mercy. **It is unforgivable because it is a sin of which one cannot repent** (see Mark 1:4; 14-15; cf. Acts 2:38; 5:31).

Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit puts you beyond repentance, and therefore beyond forgiveness.

This sin precludes pardon because by its very nature it precludes repentance. A sin of which one may repent is not the unpardonable sin. Therefore, those who are most worried that they may have committed the unpardonable sin have not. This is a sin for which there is no concern, no conviction, no anxiety, and thus no repentance. It is a sin that is so hard-hearted and willful and persistent and defiant that the one committing it couldn't care less that he or she is committing it.

So, yes, **it is possible to put yourself beyond the possibility of forgiveness.** But that is not God's fault. It **is** because a man or woman who has seen the truth and heard the truth and even tasted the truth has chosen to harden their heart to the point that they have rendered themselves impervious to repentance and conviction.

These are the people, then, who have **not** committed the unforgivable sin:

- People who are ashamed of their sin, who are broken and grieved by their sin, have not committed the unforgivable sin.
- People who feel the conviction of the HS in their hearts, who sense the piercing presence of guilt for having violated God's Word, have not committed the unforgivable sin.
- People who are in fear they have committed the unforgivable sin have not committed the unforgivable sin!