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## AN UNFORGIVABLE SIN?<sup>1</sup>

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The verses in Scripture that talk about God's forgiveness are some of our favorites. We realize that we've done wrong things that separate us from a perfectly holy God, and yet God, in His mercy, sent Jesus to pardon us and forgive us of those sins. We love verses like I John 1:9:

*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

Romans 6:23 is also very meaningful to us:

*For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

We could add to these two many, many others; but then there's this curious statement about an unpardonable sin which Jesus makes here in Mark 3. What are we to think? Does God cleanse us from "all sin," or is there one He cannot or will not cleanse?

It's important to get this right because there are some people who, misunderstanding this verse, live in fear of committing an unforgivable sin. I would suggest that anyone who fears some such sin has a very vague idea of what Jesus means. We'll do our best to clarify it today so that you never have to worry about it and so that you can explain it to someone else someday who may be worried about it.

But first, let's pick up where we left off last week. Last week, you know, I was really dragging here because I'd just been totally cut off from caffeine and I'm still not exactly sure of what I said at the very end of that sermon! I want to start today's sermon back in Mark 3:20–21:

<sup>20</sup> *And the multitude cometh together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread.*

<sup>21</sup> *And when his friends heard of it, they went out to lay hold on him: for they said, He is beside himself.*

The crowd has found Jesus, many thousands of people as we saw earlier in the chapter, and everyone in that crowd has a job for Jesus. They're not really concerned for what He has to say; they've come to get some kind of favor from Him or to see Him do some miracle. According to these verses, the people won't give Jesus a chance to rest or even to eat. They're all worried about having Jesus meet their needs, but they're not too concerned about Jesus' physical needs!

There are some, however, who are concerned about Jesus' physical needs. The word used here as "friends" actually translates from Greek as "those from beside him" and we can see a little later in this chapter that they are His family members. They hear about Jesus' plight from Nazareth and become concerned to the point that they feel that it's their duty to get ahold of Him and take Him home. Who knows? Maybe one of Jesus' disciples sent them a message to that effect. I suspect, though, that they

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<sup>1</sup> This sermon is unedited.

got word “through the grapevine” because, in those days, family was everything. If Jesus were acting out, then the family would be embarrassed and would want to protect the family name. The point is that some people hold a misapprehension regarding Jesus’ health. They think that He’s “beside Himself”—or that He has, quite literally, gone insane. He’s not insane; He’s just devoted to helping people even when it costs Himself something that He really needs. Hurting people are His highest priority. And guess what? That still holds true to this day! The difference is that Jesus has delegated His people to be the instruments He uses to help people. We are His instruments, and our resources are His resources. God can and does still work miracles, but most often He uses us to do what needs to be done for hurting people.

Let’s move on to the next few verses. We’ll look at verse 22 to start:

*And the scribes which came down from Jerusalem said, He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils.*

Remember how all these demons were coming up to Jesus and saying, “Oh, yes, you are the Son of God”? Remember that? Well here’s the result! Here comes a delegation from Jerusalem who think they’ve got Jesus all figured out. They think Jesus is possessed by Beelzebub, which literally means “Lord of the House.” Oh, yes, they believe Jesus is possessed by a demon lord, and that demon lord is sort of like the head of a Mafia family. “You can tell all those other demons what to do because you’ve got the biggest, strongest, most evil one of them all!”

Jesus turns this argument on its head in the next few verses:

<sup>23</sup> *And he called them unto him, and said unto them in parables, How can Satan cast out Satan?*

<sup>24</sup> *And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand.*

<sup>25</sup> *And if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand.*

<sup>26</sup> *And if Satan rise up against himself, and be divided, he cannot stand, but hath an end.*

Remember, Beelzebub means “Lord of the House.” Jesus points out how fruitless their argument is because Satan would never allow any of his minions to cause anarchy in his spiritual realm. Satan rules his demons through fear, and he wouldn’t tolerate any demon acting through Jesus to throw his realm into chaos. Satan is head of the demonic underworld and he will not tolerate any rivalry. The argument that Beelzebub, acting through Jesus, is casting out demons falls flat.

But Jesus isn’t done yet. Let’s look carefully at verse 27:

*No man can enter into a strong man’s house, and spoil his goods, except he will first bind the strong man; and then he will spoil his house.*

I’m so glad that Jesus added this verse. Satan is like that strong man, and this world is his house; but Jesus came to bind that strong man and break up his stronghold on this world. Jesus came to plunder that which is precious in the sight of God—men and women from every race, class and nation. He came to bind the strong man and free the captives. Jesus isn’t acting like Beelzebub, the “Lord of the House”; in fact, Jesus is the one who bound the lord of the house and is pillaging that house! I mean, other than a certain Harvard professor, have you ever heard of anyone breaking into his own house?

Jesus still isn't done. He has a very solemn warning to deliver. Let's read verses 28-30:

<sup>28</sup> *Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme:*

<sup>29</sup> *But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation.*

<sup>30</sup> *Because they said, He hath an unclean spirit.*

Those are some pretty strong words, aren't they? Jesus says all sins are forgivable except for one. Even blasphemy is forgivable! But what is this blasphemy against the Holy Spirit that He's talking about?

First of all, let's note that Jesus is warning them against doing it. If they'd already done it, there would be no point in warning them. So they hadn't committed blasphemy against the Holy Spirit *yet*, but they were getting *close*.

You see, what these folks had done is put forth an argument that Jesus' work must be of the devil when it was actually the work of the Holy Spirit. They were at the point of rejecting the work of the Holy Spirit.

And what is the work of the Holy Spirit? He works to teach us about sin, and righteousness, and judgment. He works to convict us of sin and point us to salvation. In other words, the Holy Spirit's work is the work of bringing us to saving grace in God by Christ Jesus. If we reject that, what we're really doing is we are saying, "I don't want to be saved. I don't need to be forgiven."

In short, *the only sin God can't forgive is not asking for forgiveness!*

God won't violate your conscience and force you to be saved. He won't do that. You are a free moral agent, and your choices are real and have eternal significance. You are free to choose; yet God in His love for you sent Jesus to die for you, and the Holy Spirit instructs you about your need of salvation. He tugs at your heart; He prods at your conscience; He points you in the right direction; and if you reject His warnings and you reject God's gift of salvation, you will die and spend eternity in hell.

If you notice the way Jesus said this, you'll know that I'm right. There is no sin that God cannot forgive, but if we blaspheme the Holy Spirit and His work in our lives by rejecting Him (for whatever reason), then we won't ask for forgiveness and we won't receive forgiveness. That's what Jesus said: "*But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness.*" Jesus did not say that God will *withhold* forgiveness (as in, "You've been so bad I'll never forgive you!") but rather says that the person will not *receive* forgiveness. There's a big difference!

I'll say it again: *the only sin God can't forgive is not asking for forgiveness!*

So don't mope around wondering, "Have I ever committed the unpardonable sin?" Look, if you're still alive on this earth, if you're still breathing, you can still ask for and receive God's forgiveness. He is faithful (that is, He keeps His promises) and just (that is, He is legally within His rights to do so) to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Now, having said that, I must give a word of warning: don't go around thinking, "Well, I'm not saved today but I'll just ignore the Holy Spirit for now. I'll get saved later—perhaps when I'm just about to

die.” Oh, friend, that is a dangerous game! There are two things you must consider. First, you do not know the day or the hour when you will die. We live in an unpredictable world in which death most often surprises us; and those who die on a death bed are not generally clear minded at the very end, especially with the pain medications we supply these days. Second, as we reject the Holy Spirit, our minds and our hearts get a little harder each time. As our hearts grow harder, the promptings of the Spirit become fainter and fainter until we have effectively silenced His work in our lives. The Bible calls this condition “a reprobate mind.” I would beg you, that if you have not received Christ as your Savior, please do not delay any longer. Take care of your soul’s condition today!

The last part of this chapter might seem anticlimactical after all that, but I’d like to touch on it for a moment before we wrap this up. Look if you will at verses 31–35:

<sup>31</sup> *There came then his brethren and his mother, and, standing without, sent unto him, calling him.*

<sup>32</sup> *And the multitude sat about him, and they said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren without seek for thee.*

<sup>33</sup> *And he answered them, saying, Who is my mother, or my brethren?*

<sup>34</sup> *And he looked round about on them which sat about him, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren!*

<sup>35</sup> *For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother.*

Now, remember, Jesus’ family has heard that He’s not eating properly, not resting properly, and they think that quite possibly he’s out of His mind. They were likely embarrassed about their family’s reputation. I think if they really were concerned about His health and nothing else, He would have gone with them. But it seems that at least part of their reason for coming is tied to their own family pride and that’s why Jesus says what He says here.

The good news for us is that we have the privilege of being a part of Jesus’ family. As Christians, we bear His name. What we do is a reflection on the whole family. Think about that! We take that for granted, but we should not! We have the privilege of being in God’s family and we have the responsibility to protect the family’s reputation as a family of love and integrity.

We need not recount the horrors and atrocities carried out in the name of Christ, and across the centuries there have been quite a few. Not one of those stands the test as an errand of God, though, from the Jewish ghettos of Europe to the conquest and forced baptisms of any number of people groups. But people of God, you who are called by His name, what about you? Do you keep your promises? Do you live among the unsaved of this world as an example of humility, hard work, and love? Does your reputation add to—or take away from—the family name?

Let’s bring this message to a close by tying these ideas together. First, if you are not a Christian, I urge you today to listen to the Holy Spirit and accept God’s gift of salvation. Second, if you are a Christian, I urge you to remember whose child you are, and live accordingly!