

22nd November 2017.

BLASPHEMING THE HOLY SPIRIT - THE UNFORGIVABLE SIN.

Matthew 12:22-37.

As we continue our study of the book of Matthew, i.e. his gospel account of our Lord Jesus, in chapter 12, after Mathew's citation of the passage from Isaiah that clearly spoke of Jesus Christ, making proof of Him, by the way everyone saw what He was doing and how He was doing it, as The Messiah. Tonight we see the conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders of His day intensify to the point of their complete rejection of Him, and His warning to them of what that would mean. In many ways this portion of Matthew provides the turning point for the emphasis of the book. It is one thing to oppose Jesus' apparent violations of the current rules made by religious leaders, but to say that He is empowered by Satan is another matter altogether. John 1:11 is being fulfilled, "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not."

The section begins with a miracle by Jesus and the blasphemous accusation by the Pharisees. There follows a lengthy response by Jesus about the source of power in His miracles, and the accountability for words that reveal what is in the heart.

Certainly our title which the section covers has always been a matter of great interest over the centuries, in consideration of our God being known truly as a very loving and forgiving God, how then can there be that that He can never forgive – a “blaspheme”? What does that mean or entail, and how does one clearly keep themselves from it, that they could surely be safe!

For clarity, sin and blasphemy are, in a sense, distinct, although blasphemy is sin. Sin is a large category of evil deeds, thoughts, or attitudes. Blasphemy is one kind of sin within that broad category. Blasphemy is the unique sin of speaking evil against God, saying things about God that are not true about Him, speaking of God in a derogatory manner; that is blasphemy. It is a defiant irreverence.

And as we'll read, Jesus begins by saying, "All that kind of sin and blasphemy is forgivable." That is not a universalist statement, that whatever you do or think or believe, ultimately, all sin and blasphemy will be forgiven. It will be forgiven when the conditions are met, and the condition for forgiveness and sin is very clearly given in the New Testament as repentance toward God and faith in our

Lord Jesus Christ. When you confess your sin, and turn from your sin to Christ in faith, believing and receiving Him as Savior, then God will forgive all your sin and blasphemy.

The classic illustration for that is the Apostle Paul, who himself in I Timothy 1:13 says, "Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners -- of whom I am the worst." He says that he was the worst of sinners, a blasphemer, speaking evil against God, but he was forgiven.

So with a good understanding that God is a very forgiving God as portrayed by all Old Testament and New Testament scripture, even forgiving blaspheme by both unbelievers and believers like Peter was forgiven, my understanding of the unforgivable sin is that by which one completely rejects the work of the Holy Spirit who alone draws men to salvation in acceptance of God's mercy.

Reading our text, we see an activity, the healing that was so amazingly done by Jesus and sparked off wonder by the crowds, to which the Pharisees reacted with a derogatory accusation....vs 22.....This was a very tough case even for the exorcists of the day, perhaps that's why they brought it to Jesus.....

Vs 23.....Earlier, they had said, "What kind of person is this?" when they saw the power. Now they have progressed. Then, they were saying, "What kind of person is this?" but now they have come one more step; now they are saying, "This isn't the Messiah, is it?" The next step would probably be;- "This is the Messiah, isn't it?" The next step after that is, "This is the Messiah." They are on the road, and you know what? When the Pharisees hear the question, they go into an instant panic; they must stop the process and stop it fast. They can't let it go any further.

As vs 24 says.....

So they say, "He casts out demons," and they recognized that; they had never seen anything like it. But they say He does it by Beelzebub. That is the old word that originally was the name of a Philistine god, Beel comes from Baal. You've heard of worshipping Baal, and that is just the ancient pagan word for 'lord.' 'Zebub' or 'zebul' is best connected in translation to the word 'flies.' So we go all the way back to the lord of the flies, or the god of the flies.

They are saying, "Satan is in Him." They have already said, "Demons are in Him," and that He was the Devil in person in Matthew 10, and now they are saying the Devil is in Him. One way or another, they have ascribed Him to Satan. Isn't it interesting that whether they said He was demon-possessed, or the Devil incarnate, or the Devil is in Him (which is the same thing), they must recognize the supernatural character of what He does. This leaves them only two options: God or Satan, because those are the only supernatural kingdoms that exist, and they opt for Satan.

They hadn't shouted it out to Jesus, but were probably mumbling it out to themselves in bemusement, but Jesus responded to them with three logical arguments by which they could yet again be cornered by their folly.

Vss. 25-29.....

First is the logic of the Undivided Kingdom (25-28). Jesus' argument here is very clear: any kingdom, city, or house that is divided against itself will fall. This would be true of Satan's kingdom: for the prince of demons to be casting out his demons would be folly because they were there doing his work. So, if Jesus is casting out demons, he cannot be working for Satan. However chaotic Satan's kingdom is, it is still bound to effectiveness and would not be self-destructive....at least not intentionally.....

Secondly, the judgment of prejudice. Our Lord's second devastating answer for the Pharisees was that as some of their Jewish associates, known as exorcists, claimed to have the power to cast out demons. Like we see in Acts 19:13-16, Jesus neither admitted nor denied their claim, but used it to point out that if He cast out demons by Beelzebub, then the Pharisees' sons (i.e. these exorcists) did also. The Pharisees would never admit this, but could not escape the logic of the argument. Their own associates would condemn them for implying that they exorcised as agents of Satan. The point Jesus is saying is, "You've got your own disciples doing the very same thing. Why would you say that I do it by the power of Satan unless you're totally and utterly prejudiced against Me? Because when they do it illegitimately, you ascribe it to God, but when I do it and the evidence is irrefutable, you ascribe it to Satan. It is the same activity on the surface, it just shows how prejudiced and biased you are."

Not only were their accusations absurd, biased, and inconsistent, but it showed their rebellion against the Kingdom. Vs28. "But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you."

He says, "If I do this by the power of the Spirit of God," and why does He say that? Because at this point, by the time you get to verse 28 in the conversation, that is the only remaining alternative because He has eliminated the other one. The alternative that He does it by the power of Satan is ridiculous and absurd, and reveals total prejudice because they themselves have a supposed ministry casting out demons, which they say is of God, and not only that, but Satan wouldn't cast out Satan. So by both of those arguments, He has shown there is only one alternative left, and that is that He does it by the power of the Spirit of God.

Thirdly, He gave them the greater-than analogy, vs 29....

Far from being in league with Satan, the Lord Jesus was Satan's Conqueror. This He illustrates by the story of the strong man. The strong man is Satan. His house is the sphere in which he holds sway. His goods are his demons. Jesus is the One who binds the strong man, enters his house, and plunders his goods. Actually the binding of Satan takes place in stages. It began during Jesus' public ministry. It was decisively guaranteed by the death and resurrection of Christ. It will be true to a more marked degree during the King's thousand-year reign (Rev.20:2). Finally, it will be eternally true when he is cast into the lake of fire (Rev.20:10). At the present time the devil does not seem to be bound; he still exercises considerable power. But his doom is determined and his time is short.

Then Jesus said, in vs. 30..... Their blasphemous attitude showed that the Pharisees were not with the Lord; therefore, they were against Him. By refusing to harvest with Him, they were scattering the grain. They had accused Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Satan while actually they themselves were the servants of Satan, seeking to frustrate the work of God.

That's what qualified them of practicing the unforgivable sin – unpardonable sin, "The blaspheme of The Holy Spirit", by which Jesus said in vss. 31-32.....

To blaspheme the Son of Man would be to speak evil of Him, to discredit Him and His message in some way. Within the context of the argument at this point, this would refer to the rejection of the truth of the Gospel of Jesus. But if someone considered it further and repented, that one could be forgiven.

But the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit would be the rejection of the same truth in the full awareness that that is what is happening--it is the thoughtful, willful rejection of the work of the Spirit of God even though there can be no other explanation of the healings of Jesus. Blasphemy against the Son and against the Spirit then means the complete and willful rejection of Jesus as the Messiah and the crediting of His works to Satan. Thus, this is not a sin that a true believer can commit, for the true believer has already accepted Jesus as the Messiah.

In vss. 33—37.....The point that Jesus now makes is that conduct, especially speech, reveals character. Jesus tells his hearers to make the tree good or bad, knowing then that its fruit will be good or bad. The metaphor is rather easy to understand. The tree is the character, or the heart--so if you want to produce good things (fruit), you have to have a radical change of heart.

He then calls His enemies a “brood of vipers.” This is an implied comparison, probably addressed to the Pharisees, of whom in John 8 He said were of their father the devil--i.e., the seed of the Serpent in Genesis 3. The point of the comparison is that they are evil and dangerous at heart, but sly and deceptive at first sight. They have an evil heart, and so cannot bring forth good things out of their mouths. The mouth simply utters what “overflows” from the heart.

And so in verses 36 and 37 Jesus warns them that they will have to give an account of themselves on judgment day. These lines may be a proverb, or a popular saying of Jesus, or of Jesus’ day, for the language shifts to the second person. A person will be held accountable for every “careless” word--words that might seem to be insignificant, but are not.

In this context the point is clear--if you recall the beginning of this passage: what one says about Jesus and His miracles reveals what is in one’s heart. Some said, “Could this be the Son of David?”--they are on their way to the kingdom; other said, “he blasphemes”--they are not even near the kingdom.

Where do you lie, with your thoughts, words and or actions?