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The Gospel According to Matthew

The Unpardonable Sin

December 23, 2018

Sermon Text: Matthew 12:22-32

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 6

Since we will be having a Christmas Eve service tomorrow and will be looking at Luke's account of the birth of Christ, I decided we should just press on this morning with our study of Matthew's Gospel.

The section we come to today is a very, very important one that most people have wondered about, and which has been used to teach false doctrine many times. It is here in Matthew 12 where we find the Lord Jesus speaking of what is often called "the unpardonable sin."

Mat 12:22-32 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. (23) And all the people were amazed, and said, "Can this be the Son of David?"

(24) But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons."

(25) Knowing their thoughts, he said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. (26) And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?"

(27) And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges.

(28) But if it is by the Spirit of God

that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

(29) Or how can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house.

(30) Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. (31) **Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. (32) And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.**

It is Jesus' words in verses 31-32 that we are going to focus primarily upon. We will plan to come back to the preceding verses next time to look at them in more detail. For now, let's just do a brief overview to get the main idea of Jesus' argument.

1. Someone brought a blind and mute man to Jesus to be healed. We are told that the cause, apparently was some kind of demonic oppression.
2. Along with a crowd, the Pharisees were also present and

witnessed Jesus healing the man. Notice that they knew that the man was demon oppressed or possessed. They acknowledged (vs 24) that Jesus casts out demons. The man spoke and saw. That no one could deny.

3. We should also note that this is a picture of that "mustard seed of faith" Jesus will later speak of. This man could not ask to be healed. He could not see to go to Jesus. Yet here he is.
4. The Pharisees, in contrast to the amazed crowds who said "Can this be the Son of David" ie, the Messiah...the Pharisees in their hardened unbelief claimed that Jesus performed the miracle by the power of Satan.
5. Jesus then will show them the insanity of their illogic.

And that brings us to this somber warning given these enemies:

(31) Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. (32) And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age

to come.

And there you have it. There is indeed a sin that is unforgiveable for all eternity. The unpardonable sin. Every other sin can be forgiven. But not this one which Jesus calls:

“the blasphemy against the Spirit”
“speaking against the Holy Spirit”

Now, as we have already said, there are multitudes of ridiculous explanations that have been foisted upon people as to just what the unpardonable sin is. For instance:

- Some Pentecostals teach that it is refusing to believe in the gifts of the Holy Spirit today such as speaking in tongues
- Others take the typical, wooden literalistic approach and say that the unpardonable sin is attributing the work of the Holy Spirit to Satan.

But as we will see, neither of these notions ring true.

Are there Other Scriptures that Speak of a Sin that is Unpardonable?

The answer is most certainly “yes.”

1Jn 5:16 If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him

life--to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that.

Alright, John speaks of a sin that “leads to death.” That this is the unpardonable sin is evident – he tells us that we don’t pray for such people. We need to understand this. *There are people for whom we are not to pray, unless it is a prayer such as Jeremiah prayed, which we will see in a moment.* This typical claim that “God loves everyone and there is no one He cannot save, so we must pray for them” is absolutely false.

Now, John no doubt has Jeremiah in mind when he speaks of this sin for which we are not to pray. Here are the Scriptures:

Jer 7:16-18 "As for you, do not pray for this people, or lift up a cry or prayer for them, and do not intercede with me, for I will not hear you. (17) Do you not see what they are doing in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? (18) The children gather wood, the fathers kindle fire, and the women knead dough, to make cakes for the queen of heaven. And they pour out drink offerings to other gods, to provoke me to anger.

Jer 11:12-14 Then the cities of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem will

go and cry to the gods to whom they make offerings, but they cannot save them in the time of their trouble. (13) For your gods have become as many as your cities, O Judah, and as many as the streets of Jerusalem are the altars you have set up to shame, altars to make offerings to Baal. (14) **"Therefore do not pray for this people, or lift up a cry or prayer on their behalf, for I will not listen when they call to me in the time of their trouble.**

Jer 14:10-12 Thus says the LORD concerning this people: "They have loved to wander thus; they have not restrained their feet; therefore the LORD does not accept them; now he will remember their iniquity and punish their sins." (11) **The LORD said to me: "Do not pray for the welfare of this people.** (12) Though they fast, I will not hear their cry, and though they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I will not accept them. But I will consume them by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence."

And finally, here is the kind of prayer that Jeremiah DID pray for such people:

Jer 18:19-23 Hear me, O LORD, and listen to the voice of my adversaries. (20) Should good be repaid with evil? Yet they have dug a pit for my life. Remember how I stood before you to

speaking good for them, to turn away your wrath from them. (21) Therefore deliver up their children to famine; give them over to the power of the sword; let their wives become childless and widowed. May their men meet death by pestilence, their youths be struck down by the sword in battle. (22) May a cry be heard from their houses, when you bring the plunderer suddenly upon them! For they have dug a pit to take me and laid snares for my feet. (23) Yet you, O LORD, know all their plotting to kill me. **Forgive not their iniquity, nor blot out their sin from your sight.** Let them be overthrown before you; deal with them in the time of your anger.

Are there people whom the Lord does not forgive – ever? Are there people whom it is right for us not to forgive? Absolutely. Yes.

Now, who are these people Jeremiah was not to pray for? Were they the standard pagan who knew nothing of the Lord? Of course not. *They were the covenant people of God.* Jeremiah's own countrymen. They were people who had experienced the Lord's special goodness, His redemption from slavery, His provision in the wilderness, His protection from enemies, His special revelation of His Word through His prophets. And what did they do? *They worshipped idols. They habitually and without*

repentance hated God's Law.

And THIS is the unpardonable sin. Who commits it? *Religious people. People in the Lord's visible church. People who hear God's truth, people who know His Word is true, and yet they choose to walk in their evil ways. No matter what mighty works the Lord has done among them by His Spirit, they reject Him.*

Does the New Testament give us an example of such a person? Yes:

Heb 12:15-17 See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; (16) that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. (17) For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.

Esau was the kind of person we call "reprobate." It was impossible for him to be saved. He crossed the line when he knowingly detested his birthright for a bowl of mush, which is to say he detested Christ. He knew, yet he chose the world. And the Apostle to the Hebrews here warns us lest we commit that same unpardonable sin. Who are the "we" he is warning? People who profess to know Christ. People who

claim to be Christians.

And here is the really classic description of the unpardonable sin, also found in Hebrews:

Heb 6:1-8 Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, (2) and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. (3) And this we will do if God permits.

(4) For it is impossible, in the case of those **who have once been enlightened**, who **have tasted** the heavenly gift, and **have shared in the Holy Spirit**, (5) and **have tasted the goodness of the word of God** and the powers of the age to come, (6) **and then have fallen away**, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. (7) For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. (8) But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.

Consider the Pharisees Jesus was warning. What had they experienced?

Right in front of them, by the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus had healed this man so that he spoke and saw. They saw it. They could not deny that it had happened. They:

- Were Enlightened
- Tasted the heavenly gift
- Shared in the Holy Spirit
- Tasted the goodness of God's Word

This was all a work of the Holy Spirit in their sight and really in them as well. It was, in other words, one thing to reject Jesus Himself, but when the Holy Spirit worked in and through Jesus, there was no more proof that God gives. Reject that and that is it.

What kind of people commit the unforgiveable sin? People like you and people like me – IF we hear God's Word over and over, IF the Holy Spirit shows us that Word is true, IF we experience and even taste God's goodness to us in Jesus, *and then we fall away and go back to the world, embracing some idol in place of Christ, holding Jesus up to contempt, then for such a person, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sin.*

How many people today have committed the unpardonable sin? Many. Some of them, like the Pharisees, may even continue in "religion," but it is a false gospel they

hold to, a false god they serve.

I have known many of these kind. People who have sat under the hearing of God's Word for years, claiming to believe in Christ, and yet they ultimately walked away. Young people who grew up hearing Christ's Word and seeing His goodness, yet they chose the world.

I came across just such a man not long ago. Once, years ago, he was in this church and he responded to the Lord's truth as he heard it here. He was excited. And yet, over time, he faded out until ultimately one day I received an email from him telling me that he and his family were never coming here again and that no one was to ever contact him again. Nothing had happened that I knew of – except that he didn't want to be among Christ's people anymore or hear God's Word.

As I said, I ran into him not long ago and spoke with him and I felt like the Apostle Paul must have felt-

Php 3:18-19 For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. (19) Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.

I was sorry as I spoke with him. I

asked him why he had left, but he could give no specific answer. What I did realize after visiting with him for sometime was that while I was grieved over him, he was not. He had no remorse of things or people lost. His god truly was his fleshly appetite and he walked away to go back to his Christless world on his way to an eternity of no hope.

Everyone here this morning is accountable to Christ for the wonderful gifts He has given us. We have heard and tasted of His truth, of His goodness, of the wonderful promises to us of the place He has prepared for us. This great salvation as the Bible calls it:

Heb 2:1-3b Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. (2) For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, (3) how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?

I pray regularly for all of you. That the Lord will bring every single one of us safely home to His presence. And I pray that if any of us are playing with the world, being careless in spite of all the privileges we have been given all these years in this church...I pray all the time that the Lord will deal with

you to bring you to your senses – I pray, “Lord, please do whatever you need to do to get that person’s attention, lest they become an Esau.”

Years ago I was riding on a bus with a group of high school and college age young people who were in a choir. We traveled around to various churches and they sang and I preached a gospel sermon. By no means were all of them saved and to this day some still are not. But I remember one young man in particular. He was always in trouble. He was raised in the church and I gave the whole group many, many lessons from Scripture each week at their practice. He had heard and He had tasted. But he was a rebel.

And that day on that bus I was talking to him and he said “I don’t know what it is, but whenever I am told not to do something, I just have to do it.”

Not long after that we moved away and went to pastor another church. A couple of years later I received news that this young man had been in a very serious car crash. He received severe head trauma and never did come back to normalcy. His speech was impeded and his thought processes were as well. I don’t know where he is at with the Lord, but I have no doubt that this was the Lord’s dealings. I hope it brought him to real repentance and saving faith in Christ.

If you profess Christ and if your desire is to serve Him, if you are truly grieved when you sin and you call on Him for forgiveness, if you hear and believe His Word, if, in other words, the fruit on the tree of your life is good fruit which shows you are walking in Him, then you need not worry that you have committed the unpardonable sin.

But let's be sure that we hear our Lord's sobering warning if these things are not true of us. If the fruit that our lives are bearing is evil, then take care. Sitting in a church pew and hearing God's truth week after week is the most dangerous place in the world to be if you are a Pharisee who scorns the blessing of Christ's Spirit in your life.