

“The Unpardonable Sin – Part 2”
Mark 3:19-30
(Preached at Trinity, February 3, 2009)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As we’ve seen, in this section Jesus once again finds himself in conflict with the scribes. Multitudes have crowded around Him. He is performing miracles by the power of the Holy Spirit. He is preaching the message of the Kingdom. More and more people kept coming. It became so intense that He was not even able to eat. His relatives are beginning to think He’s lost His mind. Taking advantage of the situation the scribes declare Him to be possessed.
Mark 3:22 – “And the scribes which came down from Jerusalem said, He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils.”
2. With this Jesus makes one of the most solemn statements in all of Scripture.
Mark 3:28-29 – “Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme: ²⁹ But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation:”
3. Jesus is describing what has been described as the unforgivable or unpardonable sin.
 - A. He begins by using the formula used to stress something of great importance.
Verse 28 begins with the word, ἀμήν
 - B. First, He reminds us that all sort of sins can be forgiven.
 1. Jesus is making a wonderful statement of hope for ever sinner. For those who repent of their sins and trust in His righteousness they shall be forgiven.
 2. The word for “forgive” literally means to send away. When you repent of your sin and trust your life to Christ your sins will be removed from you and sent forever from the presence of God. You will be as if you had never sinned.
 - C. Jesus tells us that every type of sin can be forgiven.
– sexual sin, divorce, murder, drunkenness, robbery, abortion, suicide, the persecution of Christians, even blasphemy. Jesus has purchased pardon for the greatest of sins.
 - D. But there is one sin of which Mark says you can never be forgiven. There is one sin for which there can be no pardon.
Mark records that Jesus speaks emphatically.
4. The question is, to what is Jesus referring? Mark refers to it as “blaspheme against the Holy Ghost.”
What Jesus is referring to here is the deliberate rejection of the saving power of God against the clear revelation of the Spirit of God. It was denying Christ against the clear knowledge of Him.
In other words it is knowing all of the facts of the Gospel as presented by God’s Word as revealed by the Holy Spirit and deliberately and persistently rejecting it.

5. The Scribes and Pharisees had the fulness of God's revelation. God had given His prophecies to them.
Romans 3:1-2 – “What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit *is there* of circumcision? ² Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.”
Romans 9:4-5 – “Who are Israelites; to whom *pertaineth* the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service *of God*, and the promises; ⁵ Whose *are* the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ *came*, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.”
- A. They had the prophecies about the Messiah. Jesus had fulfilled them all. And what was their conclusion about Jesus? They said He was Satanic!
- B. With all this revelation they turned away from Christ. They blasphemed the revelation of the Holy Spirit.
8. In addition, He was clearly revealing Himself
 He was performing miracles that could only come from God
 He was casting out demons demonstrating His authority over Satan
 Sinners were being transformed.
 Most important, His preaching was clearly teaching the nature of the Messiah and of His Kingdom.
9. In spite of this clear revelation of Christ the scribes were continuing to reject Him. They were actually declaring that Jesus was possessed of the devil. They said Beelzebub was at work. They were blaspheming the work of the Spirit of God.
10. The unforgivable is to see the clear truth of Christ as illuminated by the Holy Spirit and reject it.
 For such an attitude there could be no forgiveness.
11. This should serve as a stern and terrifying warning to all today.
 The Word of God is clear and understandable even to the most unlearned person. The Gospel goes forth and is clearly expounded. To persistently reject this is to risk committing the unpardonable sin.
- A. In other words, a person who persists in rejecting and dismissing the clear revelation of the Gospel – who persists in denying Christ, they are in danger of being given over to their corruption by God.
- B. Never again will they be stirred by the Gospel. They will sit under a clear and passionate sermon of hope and salvation and simply yawn and ask, “When's lunch?”
12. Does this scare you? I wish that it did. Some people complain about such preaching. You shouldn't frighten people. How foolish to claim to know more than Jesus.
Mark 3:29 – “But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation:”
13. Some of you have heard the Gospel over and over. Your parents have taught you over and over that you must hate your sin. You must turn from your sin and you must trust Christ for your righteousness. You must be willing to give yourself to Him in obedience. Listen, you might be thinking it would take years and years of denial for you to finally commit the unforgivable sin. Jesus' ministry at this point has only been going on for about 18 months. The scribes were now in danger of eternal hell fire.
14. Tonight I want to set before you several additional warnings.

I. Warning from the Book of Hebrews

- A. Hebrews 6:4-6
- B. Hebrews 10:26-29

II. Warning to those who have heard the Gospel

- A. How much have you been enlightened?
 - 1. Have you stayed away from Christ because of a lack of knowledge about Him?
 - 2. Is there anything left for you to know?
- B. For those who profess Christ
 - 1. Is their evidence of the fruit of repentance in your life
 - 2. Is there evidence that you love Christ?
 - 3. Hebrews 6 forever stands as a warning to us of how close we can get to Christ without ever being *in Christ*.

III. Warning from the man in the iron cage

- A. Pilgrim's Progress was written by John Bunyan while in prison for preaching the Gospel of Christ and published in 1678.
 - 1. Here is a picture of a man in an iron cage – a cage of hopelessness and despair. It is a picture of a man who turned away from the truth of Christ – it is a picture of apostasy.
 - 2. Few of us even know of such a thing today. Few would admit to it. Instead this man makes excuses for his lack of passion for Christ. The truth is although he professes to know Christ he never loved Him. He may have tasted of the glories of the Gospel but he trifled with them and now he is in an irrevocable condemnation without any hope of repentance.
 - 3. The man in the iron cage is set before Christians to warn against the damning sins that lead to apostasy and, at last, to hell. It is a warning to watch over your own soul lest you prove reprobate, false, and deceived. While it is not possible for a true child of God to apostatize, it certainly is possible for one who *thinks* he is a true child of God to do so. By his life he tramples upon the blood of Christ considering it of no more value than that of dung.
- B. The text:

Now, said Christian, let me go hence. Nay, stay, said the Interpreter, till I have showed thee a little more, and after that thou shalt go on thy way. So he took him by the hand again, and led him into a very dark room, where there sat a man in an iron cage.

Now the man, to look on, seemed very sad; he sat with his eyes looking down to the ground, his hands folded together, and he sighed as if he would break his heart. Then said Christian, What means this? At which the Interpreter bid him talk with the man. Then said Christian to the man, What art thou? The man answered, I am what I was not once.

CHRISTIAN: What wast thou once?

THE MAN: The man said, I was once a fair and flourishing professor, Luke 8:13, both in mine own eyes, and also in the eyes of others: I once was, as I thought, fair for the celestial city, and had then even joy at the thoughts that I should get thither.

CHRISTIAN: Well, but what art thou now?

THE MAN: I am now a man of despair, and am shut up in it, as in this iron cage. I cannot get out; Oh now I cannot!

CHRISTIAN: But how camest thou into this condition?

THE MAN: I left off to watch and be sober: I laid the reins upon the neck of my lusts; I sinned against the light of the word, and the goodness of God; I have grieved the Spirit, and he is gone; I tempted the devil, and he is come to me; I have provoked God to anger, and he has left me: I have so hardened my heart, that I cannot repent.

Then said Christian to the Interpreter, But is there no hope for such a man as this? Ask him, said the Interpreter.

CHRISTIAN: Then said Christian, Is there no hope, but you must be kept in the iron cage of despair?

THE MAN: No, none at all.

CHRISTIAN: Why, the Son of the Blessed is very pitiful.

THE MAN: I have crucified him to myself afresh, Heb. 6:6; I have despised his person, Luke 19:14; I have despised his righteousness; I have counted his blood an unholy thing; I have done despite to the spirit of grace, Heb. 10:29: therefore I have shut myself out of all the promises and there now remains to me nothing but threatenings, dreadful threatenings, faithful threatenings of certain judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour me as an adversary.

CHRISTIAN: For what did you bring yourself into this condition?

THE MAN: For the lusts, pleasures, and profits of this world; in the enjoyment of which I did then promise myself much delight: but now every one of those things also bite me, and gnaw me like a burning worm.

CHRISTIAN: But canst thou not now repent and turn?

THE MAN: God hath denied me repentance. His word gives me no encouragement to believe; yea, himself hath shut me up in this iron cage: nor can all the men in the world let me out. Oh eternity! eternity! how shall I grapple with the misery that I must meet with in eternity?

INTERPRETER: Then said the Interpreter to Christian, Let this man's misery be remembered by thee, and be an everlasting caution to thee.

CHRISTIAN: Well, said Christian, this is fearful! God help me to watch and to be sober, and to pray that I may shun the cause of this man's misery. Sir, is it not time for me to go on my way now?

Conclusion:

1. The words of Christ are most solemn. God is not to be trifled with. He commands all men everywhere to repent. What is the unforgivable sin?
It is constant resistance to the grace and mercy of God.
2. He receives all who turn to Him, but it must be a genuine repentance. We must genuinely have all of Him.
3. We must willfully turn our lives over to Christ. The man in the iron cage serves as a warning against seeking Christ but holding on to the world.

CHRISTIAN: For what did you bring yourself into this condition?

THE MAN: For the lusts, pleasures, and profits of this world; in the enjoyment of which I did then promise myself much delight: but now every one of those things also bite me, and gnaw me like a burning worm.

4. This warning is for unbelievers who have delayed coming to Christ. You are in horrible danger. Your delay may lead to your doom. Today may be your final opportunity to come.
5. This warning is to true believers that they might maintain strict watch over their souls. It is given that you might live a holy life and flee all appearance of evil. It is a warning to distance yourself from this present world.
It is a warning to make your calling and election sure.
6. And one more thing by way of encouragement. Perhaps you feel you've committed the unforgivable sin. There is hope and mercy in the Gospel. Christ invites rebellious sinners to come to Him for forgiveness. Flee to Christ without delay. Go to Him now. Turn from your sin now. Trust Him now.
 - A. The man in the iron cage is allegory. Most who have thus sinned against Christ do not care. They have no fear. Like the scribes they fully disregard the Savior.
Do you see your need of Christ? Go to Him!
 - B. Yes, there is such a thing as the unforgivable sin. It should ever stand as a warning. But it must never be reason for any sinner to refrain from coming to Christ. Instead it must serve to give us urgency. Turn! Turn! Today! Do not delay!

May God grant us all to look to Christ as glorious and supreme.