

Title: The point of no return
Text: Matthew 12.22-32
Theme: The unpardonable sin
Series: Matthew #67
Prop Stmtnt: The cost of rejecting Christ is paid forever.

Read Text:

I have talked with a number of people who, after reading this text become very concerned with whether or not they have committed the unpardonable sin of blaspheming the Holy Spirit. My short answer is to say, “No you have not, because if you had you would not be concerned about it.” Now, I am not blowing this off as being a matter of no big deal, because this issue is huge. Committing this sin is not something that is done accidentally, or easily. The consequences of this sin are so eternally grave because the committing of this sin is an intentional, deliberate and decisive choice that has been made after repeated exposure to the undeniable evidence of the person and the work of Christ.

When we read this text, I think that many of us instinctively wonder if we have committed or could ever commit this sin. However, that understandable reaction can distract us from what happens here. This event is the hinge on which Matthew’s gospel turns. The subtle, yet foreboding sounds of dissonance and trouble that played in the background and contributed to a sense of concern for the reader, now, right here, crash into the open as the dominant melody line. We've read about the uneasiness of the Pharisees. We listened to their questions, their doubts, and their anxieties about Jesus. But here, it all culminates into a bold, hardheaded, hard-hearted, blatant rejection of Christ. There is nothing subtle anymore. All pretenses of concern and investigation is gone. They hate Christ. They accuse him of being the embodiment of evil. He is in league with Satan. He is darkness. This is the point of no return for them and the point of no return for the nation. In rejecting her true King, Israel will receive the consequences of trusting in the false ones. But, not all will be lost. Some will believe. There will be a remnant.

1. **The Miracle** (22)

Matthew does not spend much time on the actual miracle because he sees the reaction to the miracle as being more significant than the miracle itself. By the way, Matthew, Mark and Luke cover many of the same stories, though they do it from different angles. Each one writes with his own style. Luke, the doctor, tends to give more detail about the healing accounts. Mark (who was ADHD – just kidding) makes everything in a hurry. Matthew tends to abbreviate most of the stories and cuts to the chase. However, here, he actually gives more detail than the others. But, the detail that he gives is not about the miracle itself. We do not know if Jesus cast out the demon through a word or through laying on his hands. That is not his point. He sees the reaction to the miracle as the turning point in the account of Jesus’ life and ministry.

The miracle is an undeniably powerful example of the authority of Christ over physical and spiritual problems. A man who cannot see or speak as the result of being demonized is brought to Jesus and Jesus heals him by casting out the demon (Luke 11.14-15). Now the man can speak and he can see. He has been set free from the grip of evil. There is no denying that something of great significance has just happened. The undisputed clarity of the miracle revealed the intensity of their rebellion. But, not all reacted that way.

2. **The Reaction** (23-24)

a. **Amazement** (23)

Here is a pattern that you see in the gospels and even in Acts. When a notable miracle is performed, many people react with amazement and even with initial faith. It is not necessarily, saving faith, but it is at least an initial faith. It appears to me to be akin to the initial faith that Jesus speaks about in the next chapter when he talks about the sower, the seed and the four types of soil. But, they are willing to consider the possibility.

Here, the initial willingness to consider the possibility that Jesus is the Messiah is not even given a chance to be on the table before the Pharisees shut it down by making it clear that if you have kind and Messiah-like thoughts about Christ that everyone needs to know that you are sleeping with the enemy.

b. **Unbelief** (24)

i. Blindness

What would it be like to be an eyewitness of Jesus Christ? Can you imagine standing there, and seeing a man so demonically oppressed that in his case, beyond the personal torment and anguish that dominates this man, he has lost the ability to see or to speak? But, now, brought before Christ, (and by the way demon-oppressed people do not look for Jesus on their own initiative. They need someone to bring them to Christ.) The conflict comes to a head between the demon and Christ with the result being the demon is expelled from the man and power of evil is broken. The man is made whole. His life is now at peace. Sight and speech are restored. His words are a testimony to the darkness he has been rescued from. There are some incredible miracles that Christ performs. Some of them, like walking on water, were private. Only the disciples saw that. Others were more public, and yet subtle, like the feeding of the 5,000. The food just never ran out. But, this is one of those miracles where a life was dramatically changed in an undeniable way. The Pharisees could not say that nothing had happened. They could not say that the man was putting on an act. Instead, they resort to saying that one of the most personal and spectacular miracles of Christ that releases a man from the darkness of soul and sight is

done by the power of evil itself. How perverted must you be to think that? How perverted must you be to look at what has just happened in front of you and say that? How much evil must there be in you to come to such a conclusion? Do they really believe that?

It happens again. Do **you** see what is happening here? The man who was so overcome by evil could not see and could not speak. The Pharisees were so entrenched in their unbelief, and as a result so overcome by evil, that they could not see. They could not see what was right in front of them. And, as we will see, there is more hope for a man who is incapacitated by a demon than there is for a man who is incapacitated by Christ-denying self-righteousness.

If we were witnessing this event, we would be tempted to think that the demon-possessed man is the most pathetic, pitiful, intimidating and frightening person there. In reality, the Pharisees are the most pathetic and pitiful because they refuse to humble themselves and admit that they are wrong. This blindness is accompanied by hatred.

ii. Hatred

Look again at the response of the crowd. They are asking a question. They are raising a possibility. They wanted to search and learn to see if it is possible that this man is the Son of David (Messiah). Of course, if they looked into it, they would've found the truth. In contrast to that is the response of the Pharisees. They do not question, they decree. They announce. But what they announce is laced with poison. They are not merely expressing a difference of opinion based upon further information; they are openly spewing hatred in spite of the public evidence. They hate Jesus! They hate Jesus so much that in spite of his power and compassion, they want him destroyed and they want to shame anyone who is inclined to believe in him into being labeled as sympathizers to a truly evil man. You have heard me say many times that sin causes brain damage. I mean that sin is inherently illogical. It does not make sense. Here is a classic example of that. Their blindness and their hatred is expressed in their absurdity.

iii. Absurdity

“It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons.” The name, Beelzebul means, “master of the house.” It was a title that was used to refer to Satan and that is obviously what they meant because in Jesus’ response, (26) he references Satan and Beelzebul (27) as the same person. Their accusation is absurd, as Jesus will make clear, but at least note this. 1) They are acknowledging that the man who had been demonically controlled is now set free and 2) they are acknowledging that Jesus is the one who did it. But how did he do it? Their accusation that he did it is not only absurd, it is damning. It is condemning. But, it is not damning and condemning of Jesus, because you cannot damn Jesus, or his followers. They are damning themselves.

3. **The Pronouncement of Judgment** (25-30)

a. **You don’t make sense!** (25-26)

Jesus states a basic rule of life: No city or house that is divided against itself will stand. I tell couples all the time that Satan's main objective is to turn them against each other. Your spouse is not the enemy. Satan is. But, what is true about a city or house is true about a kingdom. Most empires are not destroyed from without as much as they are destroyed from within. A foundational tactic in warfare is to get your enemy to engage in civil war. Help your enemy destroy itself. But, this is not a secret. Everyone knows this. So Jesus is saying.... Do you actually think that Satan is ignorant of that?

Satan's plan is worldwide domination. He is not interested in losing territory, he is interested in gaining it. So (Jesus is saying), how could I be in league with Satan if I am taking territory from him? Well perhaps, you are only pretending to be against him. What you are doing is actually a foil to make us think that you are the good guy, when in reality you are evil. But, again, this does not hold up because Jesus has been casting out demons over and over and over. Jesus was engaged in a war against the kingdom of Satan and everywhere Jesus went he was taking back territory. You do not make sense.

b. You are not consistent (27-29)

Jesus is saying, "Let's pretend that you are right." You are saying that I, a mere human cannot overthrow a demon and that I have to be in league with the supernatural forces of darkness in order to exert authority over them. If, that is the case, then what do you say about your sons who claim to have cast out demons? (Sons could be a reference to literal sons or it could be a term for disciples of the Pharisees.) Either your sons are leveraging evil against evil, or they are relying on God's power. Why are they not suspect, if I am?

But, Jesus does not let the point rest at merely exposing their hypocrisy; he drives deeper. There is another edge to the sword. You cannot logically say that he is in league with Satan. So, if that is not the case, then Christ must be working in the power of the Spirit of God. However, the only way that you can go in and take whatever you want from someone else is if you have neutralized their power. The fact that Jesus takes back whatever he wants from Satan's domain, anytime that he wants is proof positive that he has first, bound Satan. Satan is powerless before Christ. He cannot stop Christ from taking back any person that Satan has initially bound, because Satan, himself, is bound. The obvious conclusion is that Christ is not in league with Satan, Christ is empowered by the Spirit, Christ is the Messiah and the Kingdom of God has come to you and you are standing in utter defiance of the very thing that you claim to be for.

c. You are against me (30)

In the early days of W.W.II, we, as a nation, were not interested in sending more soldiers over to Europe. We were dealing with the great depression in the aftermath of the First World War and had already buried way too many of our boys in Europe. But, after Pearl Harbor, neutrality was no longer an option. Today, we face a similar kind of scenario. It is easy to wonder why we involved ourselves in Afghanistan and Iraq when some of the very people we are trying to help keep killing our own troops. Why don't we just leave them alone? Why don't we just stay home? It's not that easy. They won't leave us alone.

We have enemies who will do everything they can to destroy us. Either we neutralize them over there, or we deal with them in our cities and schools. So, what do you want? Neutrality in the war against radical Islam is not really an option. We are going to be facing this for a very long time.

But there is another war that is far more serious and the consequences are far more lasting than that. And that is the war for your soul. There is a war for your very soul that is being waged on the turf of the affections of your heart. Listen carefully many people do not even care about their souls. They are so obsessed with their bodies, their image, their pleasure, and their entertainment, that they give no thought to what is eternal. That is a brilliant tactic of the Evil One. But, your soul is what Satan wants to have and control so that he not only may devour you, but so that he can employ you in the destruction of others. You cannot retreat from this war. You cannot run up north into a cabin in the woods and hide out. This war is in you. Neutrality is not an option. Jesus says, either you are with him, or you are against him. Either you are helping to gather the sheep, or your failure to act is contributing to them being scattered. Do you see his point? There is no such thing as being in the middle of the road with Jesus. If you are not advancing his cause through your commitment, you are fighting against his cause with apathy. But, apathy, like all other sin will not be satisfied until all of your life is an obstacle and a functional denial of the gospel. Sin is not static. Do not appease yourself into thinking that you are okay because you are not actively working against Jesus.

4. **The Consequence** (31-32)

a. **Blasphemy against the Spirit cannot be forgiven.**

What is blasphemy against the Spirit? Jesus is referencing what the Pharisees have done to being blasphemy against the Spirit. Whatever they have done is the sin that Jesus says, cannot be forgiven. So, what exactly have they done? They have witnessed with their own eyes, the Messiah. They have witnessed with their own eyes the Messiah performing irrefutable miracles by means of the power of the Spirit. They have witnessed with their own eyes the Messiah performing irrefutable miracles by means of the power of the Spirit but they have attributed the Spirit's power to perform those miracles to Satan.

Blasphemy against the Spirit is the deliberate choice to reject the obvious power of the Spirit in the life of Jesus and attribute that to Satan. They did not misunderstand who Jesus was. They did not misinterpret nor act in ignorance. They rejected God. They rejected the King. And the reason why this could not be forgiven was because they had gone to the point of no return. It is not only a sin that cannot be forgiven, but...

b. **Blasphemy against the Spirit will never be forgiven.**

Do you realize what Jesus is saying? There is no second chance for salvation. They have crossed the point of no return. They embarked on a journey that was initially marked by an arrogant-driven doubt. Their arrogant-driven doubt produced a darkness that, over time, over took them and blinded them.

If you disagreed with Jesus on his position on the Sabbath because it went against your interpretation or your tradition, you could be forgiven of that. If you were frustrated with his failure to overthrow the Romans because you failed to understand the true nature of his kingdom, and what he was doing, you could be forgiven of that. But, if you flat out, saw a clear demonstration of his authority over evil and you rejected him, then, you would be like a dying patient who was rejecting the only medicine that would heal you.

So, while I do not think that you can technically commit this sin, because Jesus is not on the earth performing miracles, I think that you can practically do the same thing by rejecting the only hope that you have.

In fact, I believe that this is very similar to what John speaks about in 1 John.

1 John 1.5-10

Sin is not your friend. Unbelief will take you to a very dark place and there comes a point, where you cannot get out. But, when you get to this point, you will never want to get out, because you will not care. I think that I have known some people in that condition, but I truly do not know. I know that it is a real condition. So, I warn you and plead with you. Do not pretend that a little bit of unbelief or rebellion is okay.