

Blasphemy against the Spirit and the Son

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[0:00] So we'll probably read it or recite it a few times this evening. Let's go into it straight away and just read what that passage actually says.

! Matthew 12, 30 to 32. Jesus speaking. We have Pharisees, we have disciples, we have people. He who is not with me is against me. And he who does not gather with me scatters. And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven, men.

But the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven. But anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

It's one of those passages with flashing lights. Because it touches on the subjects of blasphemy against the Spirit.

[1:04] And this has been the source of much spiritual agony and heartache for many Christian people over many years. So in other words, I read a passage like that and there may be somebody in this congregation who is very fearful that they might fall and into the category of blasphemy against the Spirit and find themselves in the awful place that Jesus is talking about here.

This will not be forgiven, not in this age or in the age to come. It looks pretty definite, doesn't it? It sounds definite. There isn't a get out clause.

There isn't any small print to this. And for this reason, many people have struggled with this passage. Some people suggest that this is impossibly difficult to understand and interpret, but yet there is very clear warning.

So if you can't understand it and interpret, give your own answer. And that's what people have done. This is resulting in people going beyond what Scripture actually says to give a specific answer to the thought that there is one sin which someone can commit which is unpardonable. Do you hear that phrase? You've heard that phrase? The unpardonable sin. Right. Now what is it? Well, it's a bit like the sort of conspiracy people, theory people, isn't it?

[2:35] There must be some clue in Scripture that we can understand what this unpardonable sin is and if we know what that sin is, we could then avoid it. Or we could check our spirits against it and make sure we haven't done it.

So on the one hand, we read every sin, every sin will be forgiven, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. And then there's the issue of why this idea is raised here at all.

What makes the issue more troubling is that the idea is repeated forcefully in other Scriptures. Now you'll all be familiar with some Scriptures which are just difficult and you don't get them preached on.

There's one and two pieces have got some really tricky bits of Scripture in them. There's that stuff about Noah and being a symbol of baptism and you think, what's that about?

And Jude is sort of full of things that you just can't sort of relate back to any particular other part of the Bible. But we sort of get away with it in our minds because it doesn't really seem to affect salvation.

[3:50] This verse really does, doesn't it? We will not go to heaven. We will not be with Jesus if we are not forgiven. So this passage is very personally challenging.

The whole stuff about Noah and baptism and Jesus going into prison places and so forth, it's kind of almost theoretical.

It doesn't really seem to trouble us but this does because it affects every single one of us. We know what it is to sin. We do that every day.

So the thought that we might sin in such a way that we could never find forgiveness again, well, that's so terrible, isn't it? And so understandably, tender-hearted, sensitive-conscious Christian people have been deeply upset by this particular verse.

Well, John Bunyan got himself into a real tangle. That was actually before he was a Christian but he really felt there was no way in which he could receive forgiveness. I was talking to a Christian man yesterday who was about, I don't know, his late teens.

[5:07] He was distraught over this. He just couldn't get it out of his head and he told me he used to sort of pace up and down just trying to find the answer and feeling that there was no answer and that he had somehow fallen into this terrible position.

But as I say, this is a verse which is actually repeated so we ought to look at the two other places that I can see most obviously do have something to say which are very parallel.

They're the two other Gospels that bring out this incident. Mark chapter 3, verses 28 and 29. So if you were to glance up the page there you'd see that it's the same sort of territory Jesus is talking about.

He's possessed by Beelzebub, prince of demons driving out demons, kingdom divided against itself. It's the same territory, isn't it? And then we read in these two verses I tell you the truth, says Jesus all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven.

He is guilty of an eternal sin. He said this because they were saying he'd got an evil spirit. So it's very similar, isn't it? Very similar sort of language is being expressed here in Mark.

[6:50] And Luke chapter 12, verses 8 to 10. The particular verse is 10 but I think the context is important here.

I tell you, whoever acknowledges me before men the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God. That's an extraordinary thought, isn't it? The Son of Man acknowledging us before the angels of God.

What a beautiful, precious thing that is when we feel we're so abject in our acknowledgement of Jesus.

Yet he will find it in his heart to actually make public statement about us and say, well done, good and faithful sir. But he who disowns me before men will be disowned before the angels of God.

And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven. But anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. It's very similar wording and the context of the Matthew passage.

[8:10] At least this suggests that if we could gain understanding of one of these passages, we'll be in a good way forward to understanding the other passages as well. That would be a blessing, wouldn't it? Rather than get tripped up three times and troubled deeply, that we would be blessed by a clear understanding.

So tonight we have the Matthew passage. That's the one we're going to look at. It's got enough information in it for us to be able to, hopefully, get to a point where, well I trust that we will understand what this warning is really about and that nobody who should, who should be untroubled by this will remain troubled.

And then there's a very well-known and feared passage in Hebrews.

Hebrews 6, 4 to 6. I think it's probably one of the most fearful passages in the whole of the Bible.

And we approach it with great caution. Hebrews 6, 4 to 6.

[9:28] It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the Word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away to be brought back to repentance.

Because to their loss, they're crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting Him to public disgrace. It's an awful picture, isn't it?

This has often been linked with the passages we've already read. Something unpardonable having happened in someone's life that makes it impossible for them to ever repent.

and that something is of a magnitude that it looks like a public disgrace of the Lord Jesus. We're thinking of the preciousness, the uniqueness of His work upon the cross at Calvary.

And the thought that something could be done in such a fashion that almost drags Jesus from the throne and puts Him back on the cross to suffer again.

[10:41] Well, that's just awful. Well, let me suggest that there's plenty in the Hebrews passage that is not the same as the Gospel passages.

In particular, starting points appear very different. So in the Gospel passages, we start off in a poor place. It goes from bad and it gets worse.

In the Hebrews passage, it starts off in a good place. These are people who have tasted the things of God. These are people who might be pillars in the church. These are people who have had deep spiritual experience.

These are people who are addressed in the letters of the Hebrews and the Christian community. that's not the same context as the Gospel passages and in particular the warning which is clearly directed to the Pharisees.

So we won't look at the Hebrews passage tonight because I don't think it offers any light on this subject except the single point that the New Testament expresses elsewhere in various ways that it's always a dangerous thing to grieve or quench the Holy Spirit.

[12:01] Whether you're a Christian or not a Christian, do not grieve or quench the Spirit. That's the one commonality we can make between the Gospel passages and Hebrews here tonight.

That needs its own treatment in a separate sort of way. I don't think it's handling the same material at all. So let's go back again to the passage.

Matthew 12 30 to 32 I want to read it again. He who is not with me is against me and he who does not gather with me scatters and so I tell you every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.

Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven either in this age or in the age to come. The words are actually rather clear and we shouldn't allow ourselves to be tripped up by the thought that this is an impenetrable passage that somehow we need a secret key to understand.

The problem lies in the application. So let's just make a few comments. Firstly we can't separate verse 30 from verses 31 and 32 and can you see why?

[13:28] He who is not with me is against me he who does not gather with me scatters single sentence full stop and so I tell you every sin and blasphemy will forgive him then.

There's something very important about what is said in verse 30 that actually links with the severe warnings of verses 31 and 32. They're not two separate subject matters.

They're connected. Verse 31 something that deeply offends or contradicts the spirit has terrible consequences.

The person and work of the spirit is key. So I tell you every sin and blasphemy will forgive men but the blasphemy against the spirit will not be forgiven. If we didn't have awe concerning the Holy Spirit if we had a degraded view of the spirit regarded the spirit as some impersonal force if we didn't understand that he's a third person of the Trinity we didn't realise that he has been poured out into the world for a specific purpose which we'll deal with later then we'd be in trouble on this point but Jesus is warning us at this point remember the spirit has not yet been given in the way of Pentecost way but the spirit is evidently at work in this passage the Holy Spirit is definitely at work in this passage so he's never been absent he breathes over the face of the earth the triune

God has always been at work in his world the Holy Spirit wasn't just left in heavenly places until the day of Pentecost there was something profound happening then if it was happening in the days of the gospel writings and before Jesus died and rose again and went to heaven how much more significant this point is now when the Holy Spirit has been pulled out in such abundant measure upon this world in an abandoned sort of way verse 31 just focus on that thought it is the Holy Spirit is key to this passage verse 32 anyone who speaks a word against the son of man will be forgiven anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven first look you think that's a bit odd there's inequality in the

[16:12] Trinity why should it be any different that there should be words spoken against the son as if that's a lesser order of sin than sin against the Spirit the finality of this sentence is that you can't find forgiveness anywhere in passing there is not some smuggled idea here of the possibility of sin on earth not being forgiven whilst there might be some other time or place where even the worst sin or sins might be forgiven so some people might rather perversely take it this way anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven either in this age or in the age to come some sort of thought that we might sin on earth in some kind of fashion and find our sins unforgiven and then go to some other place which conveniently but wrongly the Rome

Catholic Church calls purgatory as a place where unforgiven sin can be dealt with in a sort of intermediate state so that we eventually become clean and pure and are ready to meet God but the Bible has nothing to say about that subject if sin is to be forgiven there's only one place where it can be forgiven it's now before we die there's no other possibility so this verse isn't saying anything about that but some people might just go off on a side tangent and sort of say well okay if there's not forgiveness now there'll be forgiveness later and indeed that is a thought for some people that is a sort of a hope God is going to be so merciful that regardless of how we behaved in this life there'll be a second chance the Bible doesn't offer that does it there's nothing in the word that says anything on that score we have to be right with

God in this life so let's now look at the context because it's good to look at the verses by themselves but there has been a real danger I think historically traditionally in the way these issues are handled by just looking at the three verses and trying to make sense of them in their own little package without recognising that there is words before and words after that set the scene and Jesus is not speaking in a vacuum here there's a real context behind it and indeed we've been looking at the context because we've been going through the gospel of Matthew and we've now come to this particular point so I refer you to Matthew 12 verse 22 then they brought him a demon possessed man who was blind and mute and Jesus healed him so that he could both talk and see all the people were astonished so could this be the son of David it was becoming common conversation now it wasn't limited to the likes of the two blind men who said maybe he was the son of David it's now a topic of common conversation so the people got it right at least they had that question in their heads but there was one group of people who were not getting it right and that was the Pharisees who choose to take a completely different interpretation and it's quite clear that not only was the man healed of his blindness and his muteness but he was also delivered of the demon because that's why they say and they had a clear evidence before them that a demon had come out of the man it wasn't just a sort of thought or he looks a bit calmer than he does normally today but actually something probably violent occurred in the presence of all those people and they could see that a change had taken place if I drive out demons by Beelzebub by whom do your people drive them out something pretty major had happened and this is what the Pharisees tend to focus on at this particular point but I just draw your attention to that this is an amazing miracle isn't it he's blind he's mute and he's got a demon you can hardly think of many more things and it's the culmination of what's been happening in the last two or three chapters where miracle by miracle word by word there has been established in a very visible manner the fact that Jesus is the fulfillment of the messianic prophecies that he's demonstrating by what he's doing on this earth that he is the messiah he is the one who was promised so you could read the different parts in Isaiah say tick tick tick he's fulfilling all of this and this is like it kind of reminds me of that sort of what you do at the end of a firework display when you put everything up in the air you know it's a massive thing and he's just giving this sort of amazing display and he's healing the guy of muteness so the guy speaks and hopefully he speaks praises to God the guy's blind but he sees the saviour the messiah for the first time in his life and thirdly the demon that has trapped him spiritually is now released from this man what a beautiful thing I'd love to have that man in this congregation tonight come up here I want to hear your story what's happened to you what is it what do you want to say what do you want to tell us he's the messiah he's the messiah he's the one we've been looking for I couldn't see

[22:22] I couldn't talk but he's done all these things yes he's the messiah and he'd say to all the people you don't have to doubt this I'm

the living proof there's a culminating miracle that proves messiahship so the messiahship of Jesus is through these chapters becoming more and more clear isn't it and that's why it's recorded for us so that we who are not there at the time are able to see to make the connections we have a whole bible and we look in Matthew 9 we look in 10 we look in 11 and we can relate back and of course the Jewish people were prepared for that by their own scriptures and so it was an extremely logical and appropriate thing for them to be able to say he's the messiah but not for some for some he was being more and more opposed and what I think you're seeing in these chapters is the stakes are getting higher the opportunities the opportunities for acknowledging

Jesus as the messiah are becoming less and less the miracles are becoming greater but the time is now limiting there will come a time when miracles will stop there will be a time when Jesus words will cease and then we'll find him accused falsely convicted falsely set upon a cross miracles miracles will cease the things that he's been doing he's giving all this opportunity day after day and we find from one group of people that there's more and more opposition rather than acceptance they're not prepared to weigh things up they're coming up with quite ridiculous statements concerning what has happened if he says one thing they will take deliberately the opposite extreme view so for them to talk in this language and say well

I'm not quite sure we don't quite know how this has happened maybe it's not really happened maybe maybe the demons still lurking around they don't they don't they've seen something dramatic rather than ascribing and giving glory to God they're giving glory to Satan the stakes are getting higher and indeed that is the ministry of Jesus it's the ministry of Jesus in our lives as well he doesn't allow any of us to take a sort of a middle road and certainly not an opposing road or rather he points out to us if we're in that wrong place so going back to verse 30 I think the challenge here is are you with the Lord Jesus are you close and committed he who's not with me is against me he who does not gather with me scatters you can misread this you can well there are disciples there they're the really keen ones we just sort of linger in the background and sort of pick up the scraps he says no

Jesus doesn't allow that middle road he says if you're not with me you're against me if you're not a wholehearted follower you're actually in some place of opposition to me he who does not gather with me and what was Jesus himself doing he was giving himself to seek and save the lost he's saying to us tonight are you is that in your heart as well are you one who wants to seek and save the lost because that's Jesus agenda so he really doesn't tolerate people who say well that's the job of others I just do what I do in my little corner as it were He says if you're going to be my follower you're going to have to buy into my agenda my kingdom purposes my ways follow me sorry that may sound harsh putting it in that language but I don't think we can read the call of Jesus in any other way and we all know that searching phrase that those who follow him must take up their cross and follow him daily anything but a cross anything but a cross he says you need to take up your cross you have to go the way I've gone you have to be a follower by following in the steps that I took myself so we reject the things that have to do against Christ anti Christ things we hold high the banner we're on his side we're not secret disciples thinking of that again in the context of what we looked at this morning Nicodemus was a secret disciple he came by night didn't he but not in the end when a body had to be taken off the cross he put his head above the parapet and he spoke up we are unwavering we grow closer to

[28:47] Jesus we get close to him like the woman who had that issue of blood I must touch him I must get closer to Jesus we are gatherers and not scatterers we're with him and not against him it's very searching isn't it we know the sin of our hearts we know the lukewarmness and so on but we need to see in bright neon writing as it were before our eyes Jesus saying come follow me come follow me so we're all on a spiritual journey and what's our direction do Jesus words encourage or disturb us do they stir!

or expose us are we fringe players neutrality is impossible during the second world war there were certain countries that put their hand up and said we're going to be neutral I was reading about Portugal it was neutral throughout the whole of world war two as was Switzerland the war was

raging around their borders but they were a neutral country they could see what was going on but they didn't have to take part because everyone accepted their neutrality but Jesus will not accept neutrality from you or me he says you're in the war you're involved there's a fight to be fought I'm leading the army and you're members of the army we summed that didn't we who is on the Lord's side who will serve the king who will be his helpers other lives to bring who will face the conflict who will face the foe we are on the

Lord's side proud to be so aren't we proud to be so so where's the evidence not just a question of not!

being against Jesus but positively for him demonstrably Jesus was never half-hearted was he? He was never insipid or compromised and so there's no undecideds in this poll in this survey as the Lord Jesus the Lord of this church looks around there's no undecideds possible you can't put your tick in that box it's not an option it has enormous pastoral implications in any church you'll know that the elders are constantly constantly anxious about those who want to be neutral who want to just dabble on the edges because we know that this is such dangerous territory for anyone to be in the people who made some profession but are not going on with the Lord

Jesus people who find excuses not to be a clear follower this should not be so in the army of Jesus we're there to encourage one another to follow him affects every church every church in this city is affected by this we're not immune so we face that warning and that challenge because it's been given to us tonight he is not with me he's against me he who does not gather with me scatters so let's be clear we're going to be gatherers and we're going to be followers then verses 31 and 32 this is a clear statement of the work of the Holy Spirit to testify and give witness to the glory of Jesus [33:00] Christ and I want us firstly just to look at this in this context the brilliant extent of forgiveness let's just enjoy that reality so I tell you every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men but before we go to the but just think of the brilliance of this truth every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men isn't that an extraordinary opportunity and promise that's made for us tonight even blasphemy against God and man insolent malicious language I thought we would be blessed by looking at several verses so Psalm 103 verse 12 these are verses to treasure as far as the east is from the west so far has he removed our transgressions from us that's a lovely verse lovely thought isn't it so we are the ones who drag our sins back into our present reality by remembering the things that God chooses to forget that's the measure and the bigness of his forgiveness or look at

Isaiah 55 verses 6 and 7 seek the Lord while he may be and call on him while he is near let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts let him turn to the Lord and he will have mercy on him and to our God for he will freely pardon not grudgingly not putting us on probation but offering a freeness a lavishness in that forgiveness welcome to my forgiveness 1 John 1 9 you know that verse don't you say it with me if we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness it's a brilliant verse isn't it he's saying it's at the very heart of the things that we might think will be against our possibility of forgiveness is actually the very thing that makes it possible for God to forgive us he is faithful and just he doesn't have to degrade his justice lower the threshold his absolute justice is involved in the forgiveness is offered to people what an encouragement for us tonight to say

I can come to a God who loves but I couldn't possibly come to a God who has justice at his heart and he says no no you come to the God who has justice at his heart because justice has been done your sin has been paid for he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness I have Micah chapter 7 verses 18 to 20 those of you who have quick hands or even apps on your phones whoever you get there first put their hand up and you can read it out to us Micah chapter 7 verses 18 to 20 we struggle with the minor prophets because they have very little page space don't they are we there 18 to 20 of Micah 7 just going to read to the end turn our sins under thought and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea we be true to Jacob and show mercy to Abraham as you pledged and owed to your fathers in days long and that brilliant who is a God like you this is the way God does forgiveness massively wonderfully richly and we see it played out in the pages of the word of God don't we with individuals so we think of Peter who sins because he betrays the Lord doesn't he he's treacherous but there's forgiveness for Peter

or we think of David and this terrible time in his life this season when he is responsible for murder and adultery but there's forgiveness for David even and these things are set before us so that we should be encouraged that

God is a God who knows how to forgive sin so there's no lack of ability or willingness on the part of God to be forgiving sin tonight but there is a heart hardening and a defiance in the face of overwhelming evidence that puts a man or woman beyond the reach of such forgiveness and this is what these verses and in particular the context of these verses makes plain the evidence is clear this is not about the out of character slipping up of David or the ignorance that was in Saul when he went about murderously persecuting the church he says I did it in ignorance a temporary blip in the case of Peter but about something deep hard set unchangeable setting oneself deliberately consciously diametrically opposite to all that is clear about

[39:42] Jesus and the fact that we have this curious phrase anyone who speaks a word against the son of man will be forgiven anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven either in this age or in the age to come this hierarchy that I spoke before I think comes down to this very point that the Holy Spirit has been pulled out into this world to give immense testimony to Jesus Christ Jesus gives testimony to himself we see that as he walks the dusty streets as he speaks and he does his miracles but there is a heart work by the Spirit there is a mind work by the Spirit of God which in one sense is even deeper the words of Jesus are being taken!

by the Holy! Spirit and applied this is what happens when the Word of God is preached the Holy Spirit loves to demonstrate the beauty and the glory and the worthiness and the loveliness of Jesus Christ that is the very heart of his work so to actually stand defiantly against this testimony that the Holy Spirit gives of the excellence of the uniqueness of Jesus is the very height of our opposition to God is a very denial of what the Holy Spirit has come to do and so in a myriad of small ways how important it is that we don't grieve the Spirit because he comes to testify Jesus Jesus who is the praise of heaven every work of the

Spirit is geared that the praises of Jesus should abound that more and more lives should be brought to him more and more bowing should be brought to him more and more love and desire and longing should be brought to him so to stand against that is to stand firmly against all the purposes of God all the intentions that have been brought out over thousands of years and will reach their conclusion when Jesus returns in glory Jesus is expelling a demon by his own sovereign power it's very clear it's a repeated act and the Pharisees interpretation is this is the devil's work they give glory to Satan so we see progressive hardening and outrageous rebellion we won't look at these little passages now but

Matthew 9 verse 11 Matthew 12 verse 2 Matthew 12 verse 14 first they question then they condemn and then they plot to kill him and one day they will kill him and it all grows and their hearts become harder and harder until there's almost no space for them to receive well there isn't any more space they chose the root of hardening like Pharaoh they chose that root psalm 95 verses 7 and 8 today if you hear his voice do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah as you did that day at Maso in the desert where your fathers tested and tried me though they'd seen what I did Isaiah 5 verse 20 woe to those who call evil good and good evil who put darkness for light and light for darkness who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter Acts chapter 7 verse 51 you stiff neck people said Stephen with uncircumcised hearts and ears you're just like your fathers you always resist the Holy Spirit what's missing is any penitence there's no indication of sorrow over sin quite the opposite and so John says rather mournfully in 1

[44:47] John chapter 5 verse 16 if anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death he should pray and God will give him life I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death there is a sin that leads to death so you might find it in a church please God do not harden your hearts the Spirit prompts us every day the Spirit encourages us every day the Spirit speaks to us every day and here is this warning and encouragement don't resist the Spirit don't resist what he says especially don't resist those ways in which he wishes us to glorify Jesus but the deep warning is also a call to action to devote ourselves to the

Lord

Jesus unequivocally decidedly publicly consistently I don't think we should read those verses and just be left with a sense of warning but we should say that's not for me I'm not going down that route I'm going down the route of following Jesus that's what I'm called to to crave an increased measure of the Holy Spirit's testimony to Jesus in our own lives to be that sensitive to the voice of the Spirit that we can distinguish that from all the other siren voices that we hear in this world to embrace rather than shun such Spirit testimony and brothers and sisters that's a word for us tonight Heavenly Father we thank you for the warnings of your word because we need the warnings of your word we're a fickle and flawed people sin abides in us despite the wondrous righteousness that Jesus has placed upon us on the