

The Unforgivable Sin

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[0 : 00] Well, good evening everybody. It's so nice to see you all. If you're brand new, I'm going to be here for this service and I'd love to meet you, so come and say hi afterwards. So you heard the passage read and you're probably thinking, wow, what is going on? I mean there's this really, the big one is verse 31 here. It's this very enigmatic passage which says, blasphemy against the heart will not be forgiven.

So that makes you think, doesn't it? Is there something that is so bad, some action or some you know, special phrase that is so awful that God won't forgive you? And it sort of sounds like what it's saying. So what is it? What is this unforgivable thing? And that's what I want to zoom in on tonight. I mean this is a verse that's been very troubling for Christians through the ages. To speak about using a cultural reference. This passage would not survive the Marie Kondo test, would it? If you know what I'm talking about, does anyone know who Marie Kondo is? Do you guys know who I'm talking about? She's this woman who declutters people, Japanese woman. She wrote a famous book. Now she has this Netflix series and basically she declutters. And so the basic thing is you pick out your own, grab, you pick every item you have up. Shall I keep talking? We'll just go to communion. Keep talking. And in summary, Marie Kondo, she's great. So her thing is this, is you grab every item you own and you hold onto it and you say, does this spark joy in me? And if it doesn't, you get rid of it.

This passage would not pass that test, would it? That's a very troubling passage. Perhaps it's troubled you. Perhaps it's troubling you now. To understand it, because it's part of God's Word. Now to understand it, we're going to look at what's all around it, because that helps us to understand it. So let's go through the passage. It's probably helpful to have your Bible open here. So Jesus heals a man who was deaf and mute in verse 22. It's an amazing healing. It's an extraordinary thing. But it's such a brief description of this really incredible thing. And it just gets one verse and it's a twofer. It's a twofer. It's blind and mute. Deaf and mute. Sorts them both out one verse, but doesn't focus on it. Talks mostly about the reactions, which is interesting. And gives us a difference to the actions. So we have two questions. We have the onlookers and they're amazed. And they say, oh, hang on. Here comes Freeble again.

[3 : 35] There he comes. Doesn't like it. Doesn't like what I have to say. Should I just use this bad boy right here? Okay. This is slightly awkward, bro.

What do you reckon now? Pretty good? I've lost my flow. Good evening, everybody. We have this really enigmatic version.

All right. So the onlookers go, is this the son of David? That's the first reaction. Is this the son of David? What they mean is, is this the Messiah? That's what they're saying about that. So that's positive. That's a positive reaction. The Pharisees, they hear the crowd saying, is this Jesus the Messiah? And it really upsets them. Remember, the Pharisees believed that the Messiah would come. But their understanding was the Messiah would come when we lived really good lives. And the Messiah would come and sort of get the Romans off our back. And they thought, Jesus, oh no, not Jesus. No, no, no, no. See, Jesus wasn't good in their eyes. He hung out with sinners. Jesus was all wrong in terms of what they thought the Messiah should look like. It can't be him. And they hated the fact that people were even suggesting that this Nazarene was the Messiah. But they couldn't deny the power, could they? They knew it wasn't like a trick.

[5 : 08] Because the formerly mute deaf man, he was right there. They couldn't deny that Jesus healed him. But then their minds, they're thinking, well, it can't be God that did this. So they think, because, you know, if they sort of go, okay, God did this, empowered Jesus to do this, and we must believe everything else he said. And that's just a threat to their whole gig.

So they reason. His power must be from the devil. The devil must be empowering him to do this. And they use the super fancy name for the devil, Beelzebul. And it would have been quite dramatic. So they picked that purposely to make a big scene, right? His power is Beelzebul, the prince of demons. It would have been a very dramatic scene. That's where Jesus gets his power from. And it's sort of a political trick, isn't it? The big lie. Like you don't know, you don't like what somebody's doing, and so you just sell the big lie. Like Nero did it with the Christians. He said the Christians, he got everyone to hate the Christians by saying the Christians burnt down Rome. Hitler did it with, he said the reason we're in economic woes is because of the Jewish bankers, so let's all hate the Jews.

And the Pharisees here was like, we don't like Jesus. Let's tell everyone that his power is from the devil. And it's a lie that stuck for hundreds of years after this. In Jewish writings, Jesus is often referred to as a sorcerer. Now what happens next? Well first, Jesus quickly dismantles their logic. Verse 25, he says this, What does this mean? Jesus is saying to the Pharisees, he's saying, okay Pharisees, you think that Satan is empowering me to release people from Satan. That's what you're saying, and that makes no sense. The Bible says that Satan is evil, but it doesn't say he's stupid. Like that's not, if Satan is wanting to get power over people, he's not going to give Jesus the power to free people from him. And then Jesus, he's on a roll, he keeps going. Verse 27, he says next, Look, if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, who do your sons cast them out by? Therefore they will be your judges. He's saying, he's reminding the Pharisees that there actually are exorcists amongst the sort of the Pharisees, right? These guys that do this kind of thing. And he's saying to them, so your guy's empowered by the devil as well? Like he's just undermining what they're saying. [7 : 48] And then he gives them a clear implication in verse 28. But if it is by the power of the Spirit of God that I cast out demons and the kingdom of God has come upon you, he's saying, here's the logic. If this healing that I've done is not a trick, it's clearly not a trick. And it's not Satan that's empowering me. It must be God. God's work, God's kingdom is happening here. That's the implication.

And then he says, let me tell you a really quick story about what I'm actually doing here. And then he says this kind of interesting strongman plunder business in verse 29. Let me remind you of it. Well, how can someone enter a strongman's house and plunder his goods unless he first binds the strongman? Then indeed he may plunder his house. So Jesus is saying, okay, so if somebody's going to rob a house and the time he wanted to rob the house was when the guy that owned the house was in the house, and that's the only time he could do it, what's your strategy? The strategy is you go in there quickly, you tie the guy up, and then you steal all his stuff. Because that's how you'd rob that person's house. Jesus is saying, I'm plundering Satan's house. I'm tying him up, and I'm freeing his people. That's what this whole thing is about. In other words, Pharisees, I'm not colluding with Satan. I'm assaulting Satan. I'm restricting him. I'm taking back things that he's stolen. And then scary words from Jesus in verse 30. Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. The Pharisees say, he says to the Pharisees, that's the truth of what's going on here today, and you need to decide whose side you're on.

There's your context. So now we get to these words which are troubling. I'll remind you of them again. Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. 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 the age to come. Oh, there you go. Blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. It's so full on that we often hurry past the really good stuff at the start, just to get to the really, that line that we didn't know what to do with.

The second bit's so tough that we forget the amazing promise right at the beginning, which is this, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven. That's, I mean, that's astounding, isn't it?

[10 : 43] Every sin, God will forgive you if you repent. And this was, of course, tested on the cross. Jesus is nailed to a cross.

Before that, he's beaten, he's scourged, the skin of his back is ripped out with these whips. He's whipped and they drive nails into his feet and his hands.

He's hung on a cross and he's killed. They killed God. They killed him. That's about as bad as you could treat God.

It's killing him, obviously. And what does Jesus say from the cross? Forgive them. God has this infinite willingness to forgive.

They called Jesus the son of David here. Remember King David? He had a guy killed so he could take the guy's wife.

[11:45] A war hero, a loyal war hero killed so he could take his wife and God forgave him. Amazing. Whatever comes to mind when I say to you, terrible, terrible sin.

Terrible, repetitive sin. Whatever comes to mind when I say that. God forgives you. He has an infinite willingness to forgive.

Most weeks we do the confession and absolution at the start of the service. And I wish we could do something with that to make you feel the weight of it more. It's an amazing thing.

It's so profound. Repentance is such a powerful thing. Your sins are wiped clean. You come to God with the record of Christ, not your own.

That's an incredible thing. But what about this line? What about the line? Blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. So Jesus says first, there is no external action.

[13:00] There is no deed. There is no word that in itself is unpardonable. But there is no word that in itself is unforgivable.

Unforgivable. So what is that? Well, what's the work of the Holy Spirit? One of the things the Holy Spirit does is it calls us to repentance.

It calls us to a place of being humble before God and saying, yes, God, forgive me. And Jesus is saying, if you resist that call, then any sin is unforgivable.

I'll say that again. If you resist the work of the Holy Spirit when he calls you to repent, then sin is unforgivable. God will forgive anything through confession.

So the unforgivable sin is not a particularly bad sin. It's any sin that you don't repent of. Now, this does not mean you have to keep this catalog of everything you've done in your life that wasn't very good and freak out if you've sort of forgotten to say sorry about one particular thing you did when you were 12.

[14:16] It's not about that. It's a spiritual posture before God. So the Pharisees had this entrenched idea about Jesus. They called him evil.

They had a fixed attitude. They had a policy of rejection, which meant they were unable to repent through Jesus. And that's unforgivable. So when Jesus talks about the unforgivable sin, it's not so much God won't forgive.

It's more about a posture before God where you are unable and unwilling to repent.

Have you ever committed the unforgivable sin? Well, if you're a Christian and you're worried about it, then no, you haven't.

Your focus should not be worrying about that. Your focus should be on the immense, infinite willingness of God to forgive.

[15:19] All the things that trip us up every day. Even the big stuff that you find it hard to shake the memory of. God's wiped that stuff clean. White as snow. A clean slate.

That's amazing. That's what I want you to remember from these words of Christ. God forgives you. Amen.