

Wonderful Warning

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[0 : 00] You'll find it helpful if you take a Bible and turn to our second reading, page 817, near the back, Matthew chapter 12, beginning at verse 22.

You may have heard of this global fad taking the world by storm right now of decluttering your life. It's called the KonMari method. It's named after a Japanese woman called Mari Kondo.

And there are books and there's a TV series and there's websites on how to tidy up your home using her minimalist method. And in the TV series, she goes into US homes, which have about 10 times as much stuff as can fit there, and she declutters, tidies, throws away mounds of stuff and brings peace and order to people's lives.

And it's semi-spiritual. Her book is regarded by many as a kind of Bible. Her book is called *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up*.

It's kind of salvation by tidying. And she starts with clothing. And I've watched an episode. She gets the couple in the house to bring out every single article of clothing, sock, whatever, and put them all out on a bed.

[1 : 18] And then you go through every piece, every article of clothing. And here is the question you ask. Does this spark joy? And if it sparks joy, you keep it and you fold it in a very particular way.

And if it doesn't, you recycle it. Now, there's someone in our house that is currently liking this method. And I'm worried. Because sometimes I don't spark joy.

A lot of people use this method when they read the Bible. So you come across a verse that sparks joy.

That's good. Other verses about judgment, not so much. We'll just recycle those for later. And today's passage, if you look at it superficially, does not spark joy.

In fact, it might even spark terror. Terror that you may have committed the unforgivable sin. Because Jesus clearly says that there is a sin which is not forgivable.

[2 : 27] Have a look down at verse 32, please. 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.

Now, last week we heard the lovely, joy-sparking, heart-melting truths of God's delight in Jesus Christ and how, in verse 20, a bruised reed he will not break.

He won't snuff out the sputtering candle. Comes alongside with healing and help to restore. But in verse 22, we come crashing back down to ground with Jesus' opposition, the religious leaders, the Pharisees, who from verse 14 in this chapter have determined they want to murder Jesus.

They're scheming how to have him killed. They've set themselves above Jesus as judges. And this passage, I think, is the most wonderful warning.

It is very searching and one of the most strongest in the New Testament, but it's also a loving warning. I'll explain that in a moment. What kicks it off is in verses 22 to 24, we meet a man whose life is completely wretched.

[3 : 43] He's demon-oppressed. He is blind and he is mute. He cannot speak. He's so debilitated that his friends bring him to Jesus and Jesus heals him utterly, completely, restores him, changes his life forever.

Not just to physical healing, but drives out the demon as well, restoring him spiritually. And it has a bigger impact on the crowd than all the other miracles. In verse 23, they are amazed and they say to each other, can this Jesus be the Messiah, son of David?

And the Pharisees, when they hear the crowd saying this, they have to stomp it out or else they're going to lose control. This is just a typical miracle of Jesus.

The man has been brought to Jesus. He's got nothing to commend himself except his need. Jesus uses his unique and divine power to restore him. And the Pharisees have seen miracle after miracle after miracle.

They've been through chapters 8 and 9 just like we have and they are profoundly unsettled and they are profoundly threatened with this. And so they repeat the abuse that they came up with near the end of chapter 9.

[4 : 50] They say this, It is only by Beelzebul, which is another name for Satan, it's only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, this man casts out demons. Now you can hear their distaste when they say, This man.

And they've come up with this perfect smear, this perfect abusive smear. They say Jesus is working for Satan. And they use the most offensive word for Satan from the Canaanite Baal religions, Beelzebul.

It's character assassination. You know, when you can't assassinate someone literally, you assassinate their character. And it's perfect because they don't have to explain away his powerful miracles.

They acknowledge that Jesus has a spiritual power that's beyond human. But if the smear sticks, Jesus will be charged with being a sorcerer, which means he'll be put to death.

I'm hearing something that may sound like a high-pitched noise or an alarm for someone. Is everyone okay? It's a hearing aid.

[6 : 01] Okay. Now that I've pointed it out, please don't be embarrassed if it's yours. That sounds even better. We're talking about this smear of Jesus.

And do you know the rabbis used this smear for 500 years against Jesus? If you read the Talmud, you'll find they say the same thing about Jesus. And the reason I'm talking about this is I want you to see that the way Jesus deals with this accusation and the Pharisees, he doesn't yell, he doesn't shout out loud, he doesn't turn his miraculous powers and turn them into stone, he doesn't curse them.

He does two things. He reasons with them very calmly, and then he warns them very deeply. He gives them a couple of pictures, metaphors, and then a little parable just to show how illogical their position is.

And the reason he does it is because all the time he is trying to draw them back from spiritual disaster. It's such a kindness. I want you to see this.

He even takes their terms on their words. He's arguing on their grounds because he's still trying to reach them. Here are the men trying to kill him, and the conversation, the whole conversation from Jesus' side is a mercy.

[7 : 23] He's seeking for his plotting murderers to come to repentance and faith and the kingdom. So I've got two points. Jesus reaches out through kingdom logic, and secondly, and secondly, he reaches out through this warning.

So firstly, the logic of the kingdom, verses 25 to 29. You'll notice in verse 25 that he sees straight through their motives, but he still uses their arguments.

And he gives three quick pictures and then a simple parable. Is everyone with me so far? Just nod. Three quick pictures and a parable. The first is a kingdom picture in verses 25 and 26 of a suicidal and hopelessly divided kingdom.

He says, If you say I'm casting out Satan by Satan, that is impossible and illogical. If you're on a rowing team in a boat and half the team is rowing the opposite direction, you're not going to get far. If you're in an army and you're trying to attack a country and half the army begins shooting the other half, it's not going to be an army much longer. Just so, if Satan's kingdom is doing what Satan's kingdom shouldn't do, it's going to stop being a kingdom.

[8 : 29] Notice, please, that Jesus regards Satan as a person, a personal power, and has a purpose. Satan has a kingdom which he rules, and he enslaves people by oppressing them and possessing them.

Why on earth would Satan want to let people go from his power? Why would he be working against himself? It doesn't make any sense. That's the first argument. Secondly, Jesus points to the spiritual power of what he's doing, and here he moves closer to the Pharisees.

The Pharisees have their own trainees, children of Israel, who try to perform exorcisms, and some of them are successful. And when they do some good, Jesus says, are you going to say that they

do it by the power of Satan as well?

See verse 27. If I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? They will be your judges. It's perfectly logical. He says, supposing you're right, suppose that any casting out of Satan is by Satan himself.

Well, what about your artizo apprentices? Who are they doing it by? Have they switched sides to Satan? Jesus is pushing the logic, their logic. He's saying, we know that demons are stronger than humans, but if you're saying that the only power to cast out demons is by Satan, then your son's power is the same, but what they are doing will prove that you're wrong.

[9 : 55] That's the second piece. Thirdly, he says, there's only one option left. Verse 28. But if it's by the spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

He says, just think about it for a moment. If Satan's not doing this, who is doing it? It's got to be God himself. And if it's God himself, then the kingdom of God has overtaken you.

It's taken you by surprise. Why is this man standing before you? He says, speaking and seeing and no longer under the power of Satan. And then he tells a little parable about the kingdom of God.

He says, Satan is like a strong man. He's certainly stronger than any of us. And he kidnaps people and he holds them as slaves in his house, in his kingdom.

And the only way to liberate those people is to have someone stronger, stronger than Satan, to get in there and bind up Satan and rescue those poor people. And Jesus is saying, that is what the kingdom is all about.

[10 : 56] That's what I've come to do. I've come as the king of God's kingdom to deal with Satan and to liberate those who are in slavery to Satan. And that's what I just did at the beginning of the passage.

So far, so good. Is everyone with me? Anyone not with me? Anyone not want to be with me? It's not difficult, is it? And this all has huge implications, which we don't have time for, enough to say that any genuine experience is like an experience of deliverance.

There's freedom and rescue in it. You sense the power, the spiritual power of someone outside yourself working on you, for you, to deliver you. And you come to know Jesus as your king.

And it's impossible to be spiritually neutral about this. We either belong to Christ or to Satan. Jesus doesn't give us any middle ground. And that's his kingdom logic. Secondly, he moves to a wonderful warning, verses 30 to 32.

Actually, I'm going to start, I'm just going to go from 31 to 32. It's very serious and solemn.

Therefore, I tell you, verse 31, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven, people.

[12 : 12] But the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven. But whoever speaks a word against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or the age to come.

Now, I am very conscious that this, these verses have never been fully and adequately explained. I've read many experts on this this week. And it is easier to say what the sin against the Holy Spirit is not than to say what it is. And there's more here about, there's more in what Jesus says and more in how he says it than we could possibly contain.

But I want to say as we come to these verses that we need to do so on our knees. John Owen, who was a Puritan a few centuries ago, writing about Jesus' incarnation, coming as a human being, his words apply well to this issue.

Let me read them. He says, we speak of these things in a poor, low, broken manner. We teach them as they are revealed in Scripture.

[13 : 23] We labour by faith to follow them as they're revealed. But when we come into a steady, direct view and consideration of the thing itself, our minds fail, our hearts tremble, and we can find no rest but in a holy admiration of what we cannot comprehend.

Here we are at a loss and know that we shall be so whilst we're in this world. But all the inexpressible fruits and benefits of these truths are communicated unto those who believe.

So let me try and work through this by saying five things about this sin against the Holy Spirit.

Number one, these phrases, this blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, comes in the first three Gospels, in all of the first three Gospels.

And all of them say that a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven but that the word against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. There is a sin against the Holy Spirit.

In Matthew's Gospel, sin is a very important idea. Do you remember when Jesus was first announced by the angel? The angel said, he will come to save his people from their sins. [14:45] That's why you'll call him Jesus. It means saviour. Sin always has a vertical dimension. It's always sin against God whereas there are other words that speak about our moral and ethical realities and virtues and decency and badness but the focus of sin is always God.

But listen, the reason Jesus gives this warning to the Pharisees is so they will not put themselves beyond forgiveness. He's not saying that they have committed this sin but they are in danger of committing it and he wants to pull them back from the cliff just as he does with any one of us here who may be in the same danger.

Up till this point he's been appealing to them rationally which shows they have not yet fallen into the abyss but in his mercy he warns them because he sees them getting close to committing this sin. That's the first point. The second point is this. This is more than logic. This has to do with our heart decisions and our affections toward Jesus.

It has to do with what kingdom we want to belong to. These are spiritual truths that come from God. They're focused on the person of Jesus Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit.

[16:02] And the work of the Holy Spirit, the centre of the work of the Holy Spirit is to shine a spotlight on the person of Jesus Christ so that we will see Jesus Christ as God himself, all the fullness of God in him and all the blessings of God in him.

And if you've begun to see that, that is the work of the Holy Spirit. But there's a flip side to the Spirit's work. As he shines the floodlight on Jesus Christ, some of that light comes back into our hearts and we are convicted of sin.

This is a deeply personal work, personal for us and personal for the Spirit. And the fundamental sin that the Spirit wrestles with is the sin of not believing in Jesus.

So any movement in your heart to believe in Jesus, any real conviction of sin has come to you directly from God the Holy Spirit. If you're not believing in Jesus and have not yet had real conviction of sin, you are personally resisting God the Holy Spirit.

And there's far more at stake here than just logic. Thirdly, there is a massive statement of mercy woven into this warning. Look at where Jesus starts in verse 31.

[17:20] He says, therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven. That is simply staggering. I mean, all of you, we all know that forgiveness is not an easy and a light thing.

And for God himself, you know, when he created the world there was no resistance. When God determines to forgive our sins, it means he has to send his son to die in our place.

And God has to take into himself the consequence and pain of our sins so that we might be forgiven. It's a very difficult thing. And any forgiveness that we have from God arises from his sheer grace and goodness.

And there's nothing that we can do to make ourselves forgivable. This is what Jesus has come to do by his death. And he's still speaking to those who want to kill him.

And his opening word in this little section is every sin will be forgiven. Everyone who sins of everyone will be forgiven.

[18:22] So he opens it up beyond the Pharisees to us. He wants us to know that every sin that we commit will be forgiven if we come to him in repentance and faith.

And you may feel like you've done something terrible that will exclude you from his kindness. You may be wrestling with something that you're deeply ashamed of that you may have committed something unforgivable.

Jesus says not so. It doesn't matter what you've done he opens the door to forgiveness. He says come to me all who are weary and heavy laden I'll give you rest.

You can be forgiven. If your heart is weighed down with some sort of sin this morning come to him ask him now in your heart to forgive you and on the basis of these words he does.

Fourthly the sin against the Holy Spirit is not one act or one word that you can't take back.

[19:19] If you read on in the gospel you'll find the apostle Peter three times publicly denying Jesus but then he was restored to Jesus. If you read on further you find the apostle Paul persecuting the church aiding in the killing of Christians and after he is converted he calls himself a blasphemer.

Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is not a one-off episode but it's a way of life. It's not a sin committed and then you try to repent and return to the Lord.

It's a settled rejection of God the Holy Spirit. It's not a word or a deed or a thought that you easily fall into. It's putting yourself in the place where you absolutely refuse forgiveness and if you're troubled that you have committed this sin it's likely it's most likely you haven't.

But if you fail you have talk to Dan or talk to me or talk to someone afterwards. Better still talk to Christ and ask his forgiveness. And number five.

Fifthly there is a sin that's not forgivable. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. And the key in these verses is that four times in verses 31 and 32 Jesus speaks of forgiveness and all four times forgiveness is in the future.

[20 : 34] We'll be forgiven. We'll not be forgiven. We'll be forgiven. We'll not be forgiven. He's speaking about the day of judgment when the decision to repent and return to him is past and that the spiritual decisions we have in this life have eternal consequences.

And it means that he is the judge. We are not the judges. It's not up to us to make a judgment about this on other people. When we see friends and family turning away from Christ, the Bible teaches us we need to pray and love and seek to represent Jesus faithfully.

I know people, I'm close friends with some people who have come to faith in Christ and then run away from Christ and then come back to faith in Christ. But the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is putting yourself in a place where you're ongoingly refusing to come to Christ for forgiveness persistently, lifelongingly, until it's too late.

Leon Morris, this is the most helpful quote I read this week. It's not that God refuses to forgive, it's that the person who sees good as evil and evil as good is quite unable to repent and thus to come humbly to God for forgiveness.

And there is no way to forgiveness other than by the path of repentance and faith. So it's persistent, impenitent unbelief. It's a radical refusal to be converted in the face of the evidence.

[22 : 06] Jesus does not hold out forgiveness and say jump through lots of hoops. When they were nailing him to the cross he said heavenly father forgive them for they don't know not what they are doing. And now he holds forgiveness to the people who want to crucify him.

And that's very important. Seeing miracle after miracle. Hearing Jesus claims. They knew what they were doing. And by calling his work the power of Satan they were in grave danger of setting their hearts against the Holy Spirit away from God's light away from the Holy Spirit toward darkness.

Their spiritual dishonesty in the face of Jesus Christ their knowing rejection of the power of God in Christ is moving them the opposite direction of repentance away from forgiveness.

And Jesus warns them so that they might see their danger and even now turn back. And I think what's really important for us this morning is to recognize that we are in a position that's even more privileged than that of the Pharisees.

We have the Old Testament scriptures but we also have the full gospel records of Jesus' death and his resurrection. We know Jesus Christ is now seated at the right hand of the Father and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

[23 : 27] We've had so much light and the question is how do we respond to the Holy Spirit? I don't mean in my feelings and emotions I mean am I moving deeper into forgiveness and away from sin or deeper into sin and not forgiveness?

Because God will not force his forgiveness on us. But what he does is he offers us complete gracious and free forgiveness to all who come to him and turn to him in the power of the Holy Spirit and we hear his call again this morning come to me and we turn to him so that every sin and blasphemy that we've committed will be forgiven.

Amen.