

Blaspheming the Holy Spirit, Part 1

Scripture: Matthew 12:22–30

Code: 2292

Matthew chapter 12 is our Scripture lesson this morning. Twelfth chapter of the beloved gospel of Matthew. For this Lord's Day and next, we'll be looking at verses 22 and following and studying the section of Scripture that presents to us what is commonly known as the unpardonable sin - blaspheming the Holy Spirit. In verse 32, we find the key really to this passage. Our Lord says, "Whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him. But whosoever speaketh against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this age, neither in the age to come." And by the very words of our Lord Jesus Himself, He states that there is here an unforgivable sin, and it is to speak against the Holy Spirit.

Now this is a familiar passage to many Christian people, but it is not always understood. And there have been many false fears that have arisen because of a misunderstanding of this passage. For today and for next time, we're going to concentrate on the passage and trust that the Spirit of God will give you clear understanding as to what it means to blaspheme the Spirit and how and why that was an unpardonable sin.

But let's back up from there. God, by virtue of His very nature, is a God of forgiveness. It is not His nature to be unforgiving. It is rather His nature to be utterly forgiving. The Scripture says, for example, in Psalm 86:5, "Thou, Lord, art good and ready" – or eager – "to forgive." In Psalm 103 and verse 3 it says that He "forgiveth all thine iniquities." Daniel, in that great ninth chapter, where he offered his prayer to God, designates God as, "The God to whom belong mercies and forgivenesses." In Exodus chapter 34 verses 6 and 7 it says, "The LORD, LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression of sin." At the end of the prophet Micah's message, in Micah 7:18, he says, "Who is a God like unto Thee, who pardoneth iniquity and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage?" In verse 19 he says, "Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea."

God forgives. The Old Testament is literally loaded with indications that God forgives. Adam and Eve sinned and God forgave; the patriarchs sinned and God forgave; the people of God, under the leadership of the judges, sinned and God forgave; and under the kings they sinned and He forgave. Throughout the flow of the history of the covenant people, God forgave and forgave and forgave and kept on forgiving. You come into the New Testament and it's the same. In John, the apostle says, "My little children, He has forgiven all your sins for His name's sake." The Paul the apostle says to the Ephesians that He has granted us redemption and the forgiveness of sins. And though our sins be as scarlet, said Isaiah, they shall be as white as snow. And though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. God is in the business of forgiving. That is the essence of the biblical message: Man is a sinner, God forgives. And so we consider the fact then that there is in this passage an unforgivable sin, to be something that must demands our clear understanding. Because on the surface it may appear that God is going against the very grain of His nature unless we understand truly what He's saying.

You know, it doesn't really matter how severe the sin, God can still forgive. I know there are people who think they have sinned some kind of sin that is so bad and so heinous and so gross that there will never be forgiveness, but that's not the case. In my mind, the worst sin that any human being could ever, would ever, or has ever committed is very clear. The worst possible sin would be to kill the Son of God. I mean I can't imagine anything worse than that. That not only embodies murder, but the most hateful, venomous, vicious rejection of God. And yet it is precisely that sin which Jesus demonstrates is forgivable.

For in Luke 23:34, as He hangs on the cross, He looks down at those who have taken His life and then He looks to the Father and says, "Father" – what? – "forgive them." Even killing the Son of God is forgivable. And it isn't the volume of sin that is unforgivable any more than it is the kind of sin. In our last baptism, we had the wonderful privilege of baptizing a little girl who wasn't yet a dozen years old. She didn't have a long track record of sin and the Lord forgave. I also baptized a 91-year-old man whom God forgave. It isn't the volume that is unforgivable, it isn't necessarily some kind of sin, the unpardonable sin is a very unique thing, and in no way does it violate the forgiving heart of God.

If you look in the Scripture, you'll find illustrations of the fact that God forgives idolaters. God forgives murderers. God forgives liars. God forgives cheaters, deceivers. He forgives gluttons. He forgives covenant-breakers. He forgives fornicators, adulterers, homosexuals. He forgives the covetous. He forgives the drunkards. He forgives the extortioners. He forgives the criminals of all types. He even forgives the people who think they have no sin. And that may be the most magnanimous forgiveness of all. For that is the supreme sin, to think yourself sinless. He forgives the self-righteous. Some people say, "Well then it must be that this is the sin of rejecting Christ." Listen, if the sin of rejecting Christ was unforgivable, then none of us could be forgiven, because every one of us, before our redemption, were Christ-rejectors. That is forgivable. In fact, John 16 says that the Holy Spirit has come into the world to convict the world of sin because they believe not on Christ. Paul is living testimony that God can forgive even a blasphemer. Right? For in his letter to Timothy, he says in chapter 1, "I was a blasphemer." You says, well, some people are just too rotten to come? No, Jesus said, "Him that cometh unto me, I'll in no wise" – what? – "cast out." God is a forgiving God. There is no limit to His forgiveness.

But may I suggest this to you? There is no forgiveness at any time without the meeting of a condition, and that condition is repentance and confession and a turning to God. In the new covenant the condition is repentance and confession and an act of faith in Jesus Christ. And just to give you a little hint, the reason the Pharisees couldn't be forgiven, the reason they were beyond pardon was because they perceived themselves as beyond the need for repentance.

Now let's look through this passage, and we'll go all the way down this morning to verse 30 and we'll leave the climax for next time. As we approach the passage, Jesus was preaching and He was teaching and He was healing and He was casting out demons in Galilee. He had proliferated His ministry by multiplying Himself, as it were, by twelve, sending out His twelve chosen disciples. He had given them power over disease and demons, so that they could multiply the healing ministry and the ministry of deliverance. He had given them the message to preach, preach that the kingdom of heaven is at hand. And busily they are engaged in the proclamation of this message.

Now as there is an escalation of the proclamation, as there is an escalation of the evidences of healing and deliverance, the King is presenting Himself to the people and giving them a taste of His

kingdom. It is a demonstration that He is the Messiah, and it shows them glimpses or previews of what will occur when the kingdom finally and fully comes. But as there is an escalating in the dimension of exposure, as there is an increase in the opportunity for ministry, at the same time, there is a mounting rejection. And John 1:11 is being fulfilled, "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." And the gospel writers, at this juncture in the life of Christ, begin to record the attitude of rejection that is moving against Christ and coming more and more to a climax.

Luke 11, for example, records a similar blasphemous accusation, as does Matthew. But Matthew selects this one, in verses 22 and following, as the symbol of the climax of rejection of Christ. There were many such blasphemies of Christ, but this one is Matthew's incident to bring the whole thing to a head, as it were. This is the point at which we really see, ultimately and finally, that the leadership of Israel will not accept Christ. Now remember, we've been seeing this as it mounted through chapters 11 and 12. The first 10 chapters present the King, 11 and 12 present the rejection of the King. It's been moving along all the while, but now we see it in focus. And we have begun to see kind of an ascending perspective. First we saw that some people doubted Him and some people criticized. And then there was indifference and then there was rejection. And now there's not just rejection, there is open blasphemy of Him, and they have reached the epitome of rejection.

And I confess to you that this is indeed a tragic moment. I don't think we can really understand the pathos of this moment. For centuries, for generations, through all of the unbelievable struggles of the people of God, they had lived in hope of the Messiah. I mean, it was the desire of every Jewish girl that she should mother the Messiah. It was the heart-cry of every prophet and every teacher in Israel that he should live to see the day the Messiah came. They wanted that deliverance. That was their hope and their dream. And when He came, they rejected Him; they turned on Him; they wanted Him dead.

And so as you come to chapter 13 something new happens, and all of a sudden you face the word mystery. Chapter 13, something different is going on, something that's never been seen in the past. God is going to cut out a new channel. Israel's intention, of course, and God's part was to reach the world. Israel was never seen to be the end, but only the means to the end. But they had blocked the channel with their obstinacy and their sin and their rejection, and God moves to cut a new channel. Then you have really the heart and soul of God's new work that ultimately is climaxed in the church, when it is born at Pentecost. But it begins to take its shape in chapter 13, because Israel has reached an utter impasse in chapter 12. So we're at the point of the climax, as Matthew presents it, of Israel's rejection of their Messiah.

Sad thing is that they reject their Messiah. I believe in the future, God will bring that nation back, because He must fulfill the word of His covenant. But in the time intervening, millions of Jews will die without God. Tragic. Now let's look at verses 22 and following, and let's focus on this very, very important passage, where we see the climax of the rejection of Christ. There are five segments in the passage, and we can flow through those five key words and understand the flow.

The first word is activity – the activity. It all breaks loose at a certain event, at a certain activity. Verse 22, "Then one was brought to Him one possessed with a demon, blind and dumb." And we can assume he was also deaf, because the dumbness might indicate that. "He healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spoke and saw." Now we are not shocked by that, because we have seen Jesus do that before. He has done this hundreds perhaps thousands of times in His ministry. There is nothing particularly novel about that healing. It is a consummate expression of His healing power,

because it involves dealing with demons, which He did. And it also involves a physical illness factor. So you really have the gift of power, as it were, or the casting out of demons, as well as the gift of healing deliverance from physical infirmity.

Now it is impossible at this point for the people to deny the power of Jesus. They can't deny that. It's utterly impossible. They don't even try to deny that. I mean, the mobs and the crowds and the multitudes that swirl around Jesus as He moves through Galilee are absolutely dumbfounded at His power. They don't try to argue that. He has demonstrated miraculous ability over and over and over and over again. And they know that such power can only be described as supernatural power. They know that. There's no other way to describe it. Instantaneous, split-second, total healings, total deliverances with absolutely obvious and verifiable and permanent results. There is no way to describe it other than to say He is supernatural. But they were ambivalent about who He was.

Even though they knew He was expressing supernatural power – the blind man in John 9 says, “Hey, you're confused about Him? You tell me. I used to be blind, now I see. You tell me where He came from. I mean, it's obvious He's not from this neighborhood.” It was very clear to them that He had power beyond anything they could perceive in the human dimension. And while they could see that, they yet were reluctant to accept Him as their Messiah because He did not fit their preconceived perspective as to what the Messiah would be.

You see, they were saying to themselves, “Hey, I mean, where is the fanfare.” Right? Where is the da-ti-da-ti-da? Where are the trumpeters? Where is the clash of swords? Where is the army? Where is the revolution in the streets? Where is the fire and fury and the overthrow of Rome? I mean, where are the crown and where is the throne? I mean, this guy is a meek, humble, gentle, compassionate, carpenter who runs around with poor people and doesn't start riots and doesn't stir up people and won't argue and won't wrangle and won't mix it up. Can this be the Messiah? This can't be the Messiah, can it? No, this can't be the Messiah. But look what He can do. Yeah, but I mean, maybe there's another explanation. You see, that's the ambivalence they were in. And that is precisely why the passage prior to the one we're looking at this morning, the passage we dealt with last week is so important. Verse 17 says He is this way because Isaiah said He would be this way. He would be a servant. He would not wrangle or hassle or argue or cause riots and revolutions in the streets. And He will not trample over people and he will not seek to gain great ends. He will, rather, concentrate on the poor and the hurting and the broken, the people whose flickering wick is almost out. He'll be gentle and He'll be compassionate.

Back in chapter 11 verse 28 to 30, He'll be meek. And this is what they couldn't handle. See? Even though Matthew points out that it is what Isaiah said would be true of Him. You have to realize He not only will come ultimately to conquer, but He'll come in meekness and gentleness and compassion. They didn't see that part of it, so that passage was important for them to note as they read his gospel later, that Jesus was not contrary to Old Testament pictures of the Messiah.

But they are, nonetheless, in this ambivalence, and they're saying, “Look, it's obvious that He is supernatural. I mean, we don't even discuss that. But is He really the Messiah?” This healing triggers the whole issue. The Pharisees are there, dogging His footsteps, by the way. Luke tells us that the scribes from Jerusalem have joined them, the scribes, many of them of course, would be Pharisees. We've already learned from verse 14, comparing it with Luke, that the Herodians are in on it. So this little group of leaders - the Herodians, the Pharisees, and the scribes - are dogging His steps all the time now, looking for a way in which they can trap Him into His own death.

And then He does this miracle. Now demons possess people. They live in people. There is no question about that. We know that. The Bible is clear on that. And they can affect people in many ways. They can affect people in a way that you might not even know. I mean, there are demons who may function in the gray flannel of Wall Street. There are demons, on the other hand, who may cause people to flail around in a fire and froth at the mouth. Or there are demons who may create in people physical illnesses or blindness or deafness or dumbness as in the case of this one, but demons activate themselves through human beings. That is Satan's ploy. That is one of the ways in which he functions.

So Jesus approaches this individual, delivers him from the demon. Instantly not only does he have spiritual deliverance from demonic control, but he has total wholeness. He was blind – instantly he sees. He was dumb – immediately he talks. He was deaf and immediately he hears everything. And all of his faculties function as if there had never been a problem. Now that's a far cry from the phony kind of healings you see today.

Last Sunday night, I watched one of those guys on TV, and he was supposed to be healing deaf people. Maybe you've seen him. And then he says, "Now you can hear," and he stands right in front of the person and says, "Baby." Well even a deaf person is going to know when you go – like that – you can repeat the same basic movement of your mouth and get some kind of sound. That's not healing; that's a fraud. Those people don't have instantaneous ability to listen to everything and communicate perfectly. I'll tell you something that I've never seen in his line and that's a blind person. Never. I've never seen one of those in anyone's line. Jesus could do it. There wasn't even a question that it was supernatural. And by the way, He delivered the man without incantations and without exorcisms or without any magical rites. Just by a word.

That leads to our second key word – the activity and the amazement. Verse 23, "And all the people" – now you get a pretty good indication of the fact that this was convincing. There wasn't even a discussion. Everybody was amazed. Everybody was amazed. The word there means to be totally astounded – *existēmi* – it means to be beside yourself with astonishment. It isn't just saying, "Oh, isn't that something." It is losing it. In fact one translator says that it means to be literally knocked out of your senses. Another one says it mean to be out of your mind with amazement. To put it in Junior High talk, to be blown away. I mean, they just couldn't handle it; it was an overwhelming thing.

The imperfect tense indicates a kind of a continual state of being out of your mind with astonishment. Just going, "Oh, there's no way to explain it. It's incredible." And so there is a very natural response, they said this. And the Greek use of *mēti* expects no answer to this question but allows a possible yes. You could translate it this way, "This can't be the Son of David, can it?" In other words, there is an ambivalence. Son of David, by the way, is a title for the Messiah that's based on 2 Samuel chapter 7 verse 13, where God said He would raise up a Son of David who would have an everlasting kingdom, and so Son of David became a moniker for the Messiah. And when Jesus came into the city on Palm Sunday, as we know it, into the city of Jerusalem, they cried out, "Son of David," which was a Messianic title. The ultimate King, the one who would reign on David's throne, the great Messiah. And so they are saying, "This can't be the Messiah, can it?" It's like about 80-percent no but 20-percent yes. And the no comes from the fact that He didn't fit their bill; he didn't fit their design, he didn't fit their preconception; but the 20-percent yes comes from the fact that they couldn't explain His power.

Now you see earlier, they had said, chapter 8, “What kind of person is this,” when they saw the power. Now they’ve progressed. Then they were saying, “Hey, what kind of person is this?” But now they’ve gone one more step. Now they’re saying, “This isn’t the Messiah, is it?” You know what the next step would be? “This is the Messiah, isn’t it?” And the next step after that is, “This is the Messiah.” See, they’re on the road, and you know what? When the Pharisees hear the question, they go into instant panic. They got to stop the process and stop it fast. I mean, they can’t let it go any further. The very suggestion that this man might be the Messiah, no matter how remote still in their thinking, cannot be allowed to be introduced into their thinking. The Pharisees cannot tolerate that. The scribes can’t tolerate that. The Herodians can’t tolerate that. I mean, if they get any idea about the fact that this is the Messiah, the game is up as far as the Pharisees are concerned, because Jesus has already blasted them in Matthew 5 through 7 and said that their righteousness does not equal that necessary for the kingdom and that their treatment of every dimension of life, religious and secular, is in violation of God’s original intention. And they can’t possibly survive the exaltation of Jesus Christ; it’s the end of them.

And so we move to word three, the accusation – the accusation. Look at what they say in verse 24, “When the Pharisees heard it they said, ‘This fellow doeth not cast out demons but by Beelzebub, the prince of the demons.’” Now the phrase this fellow, there, is the way of translating a derisive concept. This sort of nobody, this nondescript, this whoever he is, no one from nowhere type approach. This can’t be the Messiah. I mean, we can’t even tolerate such a thought. What He does He does by Satan’s power.

Now if you look at verse 24, you see that the Pharisees heard it and said – but you don’t see where they were or who they said it to, so we have to pull in a little bit of help from the other gospels. The best we can reconstruct is that Jesus probably went inside a house, and He was in there with the people around Him, and they were saying, “This can’t be the Messiah, can it?” And the Pharisees, of course, had piled up on the outside of the house, and they were then separated from Jesus some distance, so they begin to poison the crowd. And so they’re saying this to the people, not to Jesus. And another good indicator of that is in verse 25. It says, “Jesus knew their thoughts,” which assumes that He didn’t hear what they said in His own ear, but He doesn’t need to hear, because He can read minds.

So they were poisoning the people, and they were saying, “He does this by the power of Beelzebub.” Now I want to give them credit. They really saw the issue clearly, and there was no question in their mind. They saw the issue clearly. What He did obviously took supernatural power. There was no way they could avoid that. They knew that. Now let me tell you something people, that is a monumental apologetic for the life of Christ, when His enemies who hated Him the most could do nothing but conclude that what He did He did by supernatural power. That’s His enemies. There was no way to argue that. And a person who comes along and tries to argue that is a fool. You not only have the testimony of His friends, but you have the testimony of His enemies, that He was doing things that were beyond human capability. You can’t come along with any of that patronizing stuff about His a good man, nice guy, good teacher. His friends won’t let you and neither will His enemies. That is a category of information that Jesus does not allow you to stand in.

You must conclude that He’s supernatural. Then it becomes an issue of whether you think it’s God or Satan, because those are the only two supernatural kingdoms that exist. Now obviously, they weren’t going to assign Him to God, so they only had one alternative. You see, they see the issue very clearly. And the Pharisees, then, from my standpoint, become some of the greatest defenders of the

supernatural character of Christ.

They have to defend the fact that He is supernatural, so they say, “He casts out demons” – they recognized that. They’d never seen anything like it. But He did it by Beelzebub. Now Beelzebub is that old word – we’ve seen it before – that originally was the name of a Philistine god, Beel or B-E-E-L comes from B-A-A-L, Baal. You’ve heard of worshiping Baal? Well Baal is just the ancient pagan word for lord – for lord. And Zebub or Zebul is best connected really in translation to the word flies. And so you go all the way back to the lord of the flies or the god of the flies. The Ekronites worshiped the god of the flies, if you can imagine. Well it was a little play on words done, because there is another word, not Zebub or Zebul but Zebel, which means dung. And so apparently, they even called this Beelzebub Beelzebel, which was a sort of a derisive thing saying, “Your lord of the flies is nothing but the lord of the dung.” And it would be easy to do that kind of a little play on words, because flies tend to hang around – well you get the picture. So that’s probably what was in mind.

And so through the centuries, this lord of the flies or lord of the dung or whatever title for this deity became a very common title for Satan. And to be the prince of demons or Beelzebub was simply using one of the titles of Satan. And Jesus recognized this, because in verse 26 when He answers, He uses the word Satan in response to their word Beelzebub. So they are saying this, “Satan is in Him.” Now they’ve already said, “Demons are in Him.” They said that in John 8. They already said He is the Devil in person in Matthew chapter 10, and now they are saying the Devil is in Him. So one way or another, they have ascribed Him to Satan. But isn’t it interesting, whether they said He’s demon-possessed, whether they said He’s the Devil incarnate or the Devil is in Him, which is the same thing, they must recognize the supernatural character of what He does. Which leaves them only those two options: God or Satan. Because those are the only supernatural kingdoms that exist and they opt out for Satan. Now let me tell you, by their own apologetics, if they’re wrong about Satan, what option does that leave us? Only one. That He’s God.

So watch how Jesus deals with that and destroys their stupid accusation. Verse 25, “And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them.” They didn’t say anything to Him. They said it to the crowd. They wouldn’t confront Him, but He confronts them. He didn’t hear what they said, but He read their thoughts, and Matthew just slides that in in case you have any question about His power. He reads minds. He read their thoughts. And in Mark 3, it says they were outside the house, so He called to them. He yelled at them. He was going to expose them and carry on this whole deal in public. In a real sense – do you know something? – that is a compassionate act on Christ’s part, for to those Pharisees, and to them alone, it would be a demonstration of His power, wouldn’t it? Because they and they alone would know that He could read their thoughts. And even in that, there is something of a wooing, something of a demonstration of power to them that speaks of His willingness to yet prove Himself.

So we go from the activity to the amazement to the accusation. Let’s look at the answer, and this is marvelous. Jesus answers their accusation by telling them that there are three things wrong with it. Number one, it is absurd. Okay? It is absurd. That means illogical, unreasonable, stupid, inane. Watch verse 25, “He said to them, ‘Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand.’” Now that’s what we call a truism. You don’t have to be a Phi Beta Kappa to figure it out. You don’t have to have a PhD to know that. A kingdom divided against itself is going to fall. A house divided against itself is going to fall. A city divided against itself is going to fall. You can’t have civil war and survive. You can unify one against another and survive, but you can’t destroy the one. You can’t have chaos in a house, chaos in a city, chaos in

a nation, without having the whole thing begin to fall apart. A kingdom divided against itself can't stand; that's simply a truism. I mean, anybody can understand that, and so they should understand it. And he makes the application in verse 26, "If Satan casts out Satan, then he is divided against himself. How then shall his kingdom stand?"

Now you see when He said what is in verse 25, they would have to nod and say, "That's true." Sure. A kingdom divided against itself can't stand. A house in a city can't stand. So if Satan is casting out Satan, then he is divided against himself. How is his kingdom going to survive? In other words, you think Satan is so stupid that he's going to commit suicide? That he is going to have all of the demons casting each other out and defeating their purpose? He's going to set up a plan and have this bunch of demons work the plan and this bunch try to stop them? I mean, that wouldn't make a lot of sense, would it? Give him a little credit. Outside the Trinity, he's the most intelligent being in existence. I mean, it's absurd. Your conclusion is asinine.

Now follow the reasoning. Jesus did deeds that could only be explained as supernatural. Since even His critics knew that, they had only one of two choices. Either He did them by the power of Satan or by the power of God. They chose the power of Satan. Jesus says, "That's absurd." What alternative is left? And by their own stupidity, they are forced into the very obvious truth that what He does he does by the power of God. Tremendous. Boy, you talk about putting them in a corner with their own words.

Now let me just add a footnote. Satan is not going to go around trying to destroy his own work, but Jesus spent all of His ministry casting out Satan. Now if He was doing that by the power of Satan, then Satan is destroying his own kingdom, and believe me, that is not his goal. Now let me just say two things that I want you to note as footnotes at this point. While I don't believe that Satan is going to go about casting out Satan all the time, I do believe that there will be inconsistency in Satan's kingdom. So don't be surprised if as you look at how Satan operates, you do see that from time to time he is inconsistent.

It's very important to note that, and the reason is very simple. Satan is utter evil. He is total evil and utter evil will be utterly chaotic, because evil is chaos. And so within Satan's domain, there will be chaos. And in that chaos, there will be inconsistency, plus he is not omnipotent, so he really can't control everything. He is not omniscient, so he doesn't really know everything, although he can fly fast and pick up any information he needs pretty quick. He is not omnipresent. So because he's not omnipotent, omniscient, or omnipresent, and because there is chaos in evil, there will be a certain sense in which there's chaos in his kingdom. But not to the extent where he is going around casting himself out. I mean he may have a pile of uncooperative demons over here, messing with something that he'd rather not have them mess with, but he himself will not dwell within an individual and go around and cast himself out.

Now let me add another footnote. I believe there are times when Satan disguises himself as a worker for God and appears to be casting demons out to reinforce that he's on God's side. I think this can be seen in the history of exorcisms in the Roman Catholic system. It can be seen even in some modern exorcisms in very far out, almost cultic Charismatic fringe groups, where there is the appearance that demons are being cast out. But that is a deception to make people think that this is God's way of dealing with Satan, when in fact it isn't. And I don't think those exorcisms even happen. I think Satan deceives and makes people think they happen.

So while we agree that Satan may deceive and want us to think, on some occasions, that he's casting demons out in the name of God, and while there is going to be chaos in a chaotic, evil system, at the same time, the statement Jesus makes is still true. Satan will not go around casting out his demons and defeating his system. Therefore, if Jesus is doing this and it is a flow of life in His ministry, you can be sure He is not of Satan. So your accusation is absurd.

Secondly, it is prejudiced. It is prejudice. It shows the rotten, evil bias of your own hearts. Verse 27, He says, okay, "If I, by Beelzebub, cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out?" Now what do you mean by that. Well, in other words, "Don't your sons do the same thing?" Who are our sons? Well, it's simply a reference to the sons of the Pharisees, a way of saying the disciples of the Pharisees, such as in 2 Kings chapter 2 verse 3 where it talks about the sons of the prophets. There were certain people who sat at the feet of the Pharisees to learn their system, their legalism, their approach to life. They became known, as it were, as the sons or the disciples of the Pharisees. And among those were groups of the sons of the Pharisees who were involved in exorcisms. They were going around – Josephus talks about them – with strange incantations and strange activities, trying to cast out demons. We even meet a gang of them in the nineteenth chapter of Acts who were miserably unsuccessful and not only that, they were trying to con the whole Jesus thing to get it on their side. They were trying, as it were, to attach Jesus to their activity and use His name because it seemed to have so much magical power. And the demons even said to them, "Jesus I know and Paul I know, but who in the world are you guys?" Even the demons didn't bother with them.

But there were – they indicate, Acts 19, that there were some groups of Jewish exorcists, no doubt disciples of the Pharisees. They certainly wouldn't be disciples of the Sadducees. The Sadducees didn't even believe in demons. And so they were out doing the same things with their little magical deals and their incantations. And of course when they heard the name Jesus worked, they would want to bring the name Jesus in and throw that one around and do whatever holy hocus-pocus needed to be done to supposedly deliver people. It didn't really happen, as I said, but that isn't the point here. The point is simply this, you've got your own sons doing the very same thing. Why would you say I do it by the power of Satan unless you're just totally and utterly prejudiced against Me? Because when they do it, and it isn't even legitimate, you ascribe it to God. When I do it and the evidence is irrefutable, you ascribe it to Satan. It is the same activity on the surface, it just shows how prejudiced you are. You're biased.

And you want to know something people? That is the heart of the matter in dealing with Jesus Christ. People do not reject Jesus Christ because there is lack of evidence that He is God. They reject Him because they are biased against Him. And they are biased, for the most part, because men love darkness rather than light because their – what? – their deeds are evil. They don't want the intimidation that Christ brings into their sinful life. And in their bias, instead of being open to receive Him, they push Him away and they in therefore doing that have to conclude absurd things about Him and prejudicial things about Him.

He even takes them a step further and says, "Why don't you let your sons be the judge?" Let them be your judge. Let the ones that are doing it be your judge. Bring them in and ask them a simple question, is implied. "Do you do this by the power of God or Satan?" Well what do you think they're going to say? If they say they do it by the power of Satan, they'll betray the whole system. They'll condemn themselves. But on the other hand, if they say they do it by the power of God, then they're going to affirm that Jesus is doing the same thing; He must be doing it by the power of God. Let them judge. Let them judge. You're so prejudiced, so biased.

Thirdly, His answer says you are rebellious. And this is just the climax. You're rebellious. Not only is your accusation absurd and biased and inconsistent, but it shows your rebellion against the kingdom. Verse 28, "But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you." Oh, man. What a statement. Now the truth is that He does cast out demons by the power of the Spirit of God. Right? Anything else would be absurd. So we know it is God's power. And by the way, Jesus, in His incarnation as a servant, restricted the use of His own prerogatives, was obedient to the Father, and energized by the Spirit. So the Spirit was doing this through Him. Underline that in your Bible. That's the key to understanding the unpardonable sin, which we'll get into next time.

So he was doing it by the power of the Holy Spirit. Now He says, "If I do this by the power of the Spirit of God" – now why does He say that? Because at this point, by the time you get to verse 28 in the conversation, that is the only remaining alternative. You understand that? He has eliminated the other one. The alternative that He does it by the power of Satan is ridiculous and absurd and also reveals total prejudice. Why? Because they themselves have a supposed ministry casting out demons, which is of God, they say, and not only that, Satan wouldn't cast out Satan. So by both of those arguments, He has shown there is only one alternative left, and that is that He does it by the power of the Spirit of God.

So He says, okay – and you can see the absolute genius of the divine mind. I mean, He has them in a corner from which they can never get out. Now He says, "If then, which the only remaining alternative, I do it by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom is here." What do you mean? You know where the kingdom is, folk? The kingdom is where the King happens to be. And He is saying then, "I am the King and the kingdom is near you." Boy, that puts them in a real serious position. The kingdom is near and they are so far. They are than Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum. Those cities were indifferent They're not indifferent, they're blasphemous.

There is a kingdom future, in the millennial kingdom. There is a kingdom future beyond that in the eternal kingdom, the new heavens and the new earth, and we believe in that. But we also believe that the kingdom is wherever the King is, and I believe if the King lives in my life, the kingdom is there, the sphere of His rule. And He is saying to them, "I am the King. That is the only alternative, and if I am the King, then the kingdom has come unto you." Won't you recognize that? There's no other alternative, people. Absolutely no other alternative. Hasn't He demonstrated the powers of the kingdom? Hasn't He healed the sick? Hasn't He cleansed the lepers? Hasn't He freed the demonized? Hasn't He raised the dead, pardoned the sinners, preached the truth, unmasked the hypocrites? He's done everything to demonstrate who He is, and there is no other explanation than that He is supernatural, and there's no other way than to say that His supernatural power comes from God, because anything else would be utterly absurd. And if that's true, then the kingdom is here.

He demonstrates that most marvelously in verse 29 by another truism. He is saying, in effect, "The kingdom of God is overpowering the kingdom of Satan. Can't you see that? This is the kingdom of God. And in delivering it, I have demonstrated My power over the kingdom of Satan. Or else, how can one enter into a strong man's house and spoil his property – or steal his property except he first bind the strong man? And then he will plunder his house." Let's say there's a guy who's very strong man, that's the idea, and he owns a house and you want to rob his house. You don't go into his house and say, "Look, I'd like you to help me. I'm going to rob you. Now, I'd like four of those and five" – no. You have to tie him up. And in order to tie up a strong man who knows you're going to rob

his house, believe me, you have to be stronger than he is. People say that when you get into a situation, you know, where something like that happens in your home, you tend to be about three times as strong as you normally are. You're threatened with life-and-death issues and your adrenaline starts pumping and all of a sudden you have some resource you call upon and you become tremendously strong.

And here is someone who is going to come in, rob a house, and he is going to tie up not only a man who's strong to begin with but gets stronger and stronger as he realizes what's going on. In other words, the person is a very strong man who can bind such a strong man. That's a truism. If you're going to go rob a house, the house is owned by a strong man, you want to steal his goods, you're going to have to tie him up. What's He saying? He's saying, "Haven't I demonstrated to you, by the ability that I have to tie up Satan, that I am greater than he? Haven't I shown you that My ability to steal his property, to control his hosts, to throw out his demons, to deliver men who are captive to his system, to free them from their diseases, haven't I shown you that I can spoil his house? And if I can spoil his house, I can bind him up; and if I can bind him up, I'm greater than he." And the theology of Israel was the same as our theology at that point. They knew well that Lucifer was the anointed cherub and the only one higher than he was God Himself. There is only one person who can bind the Devil.

I hear people going around saying, "I'm going to bind Satan." Forget it, folks. You couldn't get in that house. You're not strong enough to bind that man. There's only one who can bind him, and to find out who it is, read Revelation chapter 20. At the beginning of the millennial kingdom, the Lord binds him for a thousand years. And this is a little taste of the kingdom. If you need any greater demonstration that Christ can bind Satan in the millennium than this, then you're not looking very closely. He proves He can tie him up. Why? Because He can plunder his house. He can steal men who are captive to His system. He can deliver the demons out of them. He can control that whole operation.

Here was a man earlier we read about who had in him a legion of demons. And a legion could be anywhere from 3,000 to 6,000 Roman soldiers, and Jesus with a word could deliver him instantaneously. He had control over all the demons. He had control over the men who were captive to the demons. He could spoil Satan's house any time He wanted. That is the essence of Colossians 1:13, that Christ has come into the world to deliver men from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of His dear Son. He has power over that dominion. He has power over that world. And if that is true, then there is only one greater and that's God. He must be who He claimed to be.

And so Christ entered into Satan's house, tied him up, and stole his property. He is still doing that, by the way, you know that? Once, we were all Satan's property, weren't we? Sure we were. We were children of wrath. We were like the Jews in John 8, "Sons of our father, the Devil." We belonged to him. We were ruled by the prince of the power of the air, Ephesians 2, and He took us out of his hand and delivered us, just as He delivered this soul on that day. Jesus had already demonstrated His power over Satan in Matthew 4 in the temptation. This was just a reaffirmation of that.

You know, in Luke 10, the Lord talks about having power over Satan, total power, and even says, in Luke 10 that, "I commit unto My disciples the same power over Satan." Jesus had begun – mark this – to tie Satan up, something He will do fully in the kingdom and throughout eternity, when He binds him for a thousand years, lets him loose a little while, and then casts him into the pit of fire. The death-blow to Satan was struck at the Cross, wasn't it, where Jesus destroyed him who had the

power of death, even the Devil, Hebrews 2. Presently, Satan is still running around, but his power is limited, his doom is sealed, and his time is short.

So what is Jesus saying? He's saying, "Listen, I'm the King and I've proved it by My ability to control Satan's dominion. And if I'm the King, then the kingdom is here." And what does that mean? It's available to you. Enter it. How do you enter it? By faith in Christ. And then He tells them you got to make a decision. Verse 30, "He that is not with Me is against Me. He that gathers not with Me scattereth abroad." He used a similar phrase to that in Mark 9:40, but He had a whole different meaning in mind. There, He was talking about service. Here He's talking about salvation. And what He means here is very simple. There's no neutrality. You either gather or scatter. You either say, "Jesus is of Satan," or, "He's of God." And you have only those two options because you can't deny His supernatural power. You can't. And if you want to say He's of Satan, then you have just said an absurdity and you've revealed your prejudice. Because He went about doing good things and delivering people from Satan. And why would you say of Him that He's Satanic when you will say of others who do the same that they're not? You are prejudiced and you are absurd, and you reveal that at the bottom of it, you are rebelling against the reality of the kingdom that is here.

Beloved, there is nothing you can do with Jesus Christ except to affirm that He is who He claimed to be. And there's no middle ground. You can't just say He's a nice man, good teacher, moral fellow, religious leader. He is either of Satan or of God, and if you don't want to stand with the absurd, biased, rebellious Pharisees, you're left with the fact that He's of God, and you can bring the whole thing down to this: "You're either with Me or" – what? – "against Me." I mean, that's that simple.

First of all, that's your personal relationship. You're either with Him by faith – you've affirmed that He is the Son of God, the Messiah, the Savior of the world – or you're against Him – He is of the Devil. And once you've made that decision, then it affects how you operate. You will then either gather with Him into the kingdom, or you will scatter away from the kingdom. So verse 30 deals with personal relationship and your effect on others. You are either a part of drawing men into His kingdom or a part of sending them away based on whether you're with Him or against Him.

Listen, what Jesus is saying is this – now mark it and we'll end right here. There is no question about who I am. None at all. The only people who make wrong conclusions are absurd, prejudiced, rebellious people who are not for Me or with Me but against Me, who do not want to gather into My kingdom but want to scatter. And it is those kinds of people that He addresses verses 31 and 32 directly to. Who are those who commit this sin? When can it be committed and how? We'll see that next time. Don't miss it. Let's pray.

Search our hearts, Lord, to see if there is any area of consideration that we have left untouched regarding Jesus Christ. If there are some who have not yet confessed Christ as Lord, open their hearts to Him. We pray that they might do that today. Help us to see clearly that there is no neutrality. You either believe that Christ is of God or of the Devil. There is no middle ground. Help us, Lord, all to be grateful that You have made the options so clear to us, that we can see that Christ is who He claimed to be.

If there is any beloved heart and soul here who has not yet embraced Christ, may this be the day that they do that, the day that they open their life to Him, confessing Him as Lord. Father, we pray that no one will turn their back on Him. Thank You that Jesus Christ died on the cross and rose for us, that He wants to forgive our sin and save us as we come in repentance to Him. God, we pray that

You'll work a repentant work in the hearts of all who need Christ. Father, bring to the prayer room those that You would have to come.

Thank You for the clear word of Scripture to us. Thank you for Your great heart of forgiveness, that when any sinner comes, desiring to repent and confess, You'll receive that sinner no matter what the sin. So receive sinners today, Lord, and thank You for continuing to cleanse us who believe. Give us a day of blessedness. Bring us together again tonight, realizing the great privilege that is ours to fellowship with Your people and to be in Your Word. We'll thank You in Christ's name. Amen.

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