

23-Learning from Serious Accusations against Jesus sermonaudio.com

Series on Mark
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Bible Text: Mark 3:19b-30
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Our Scripture reading this evening is again from the Gospel of Mark as we continue to expound the Gospel of Mark to you, this time chapter 3, verses 19b through 30. That will be our text this evening as well, 3:19b-30.

Hear the word of God.

19 ... and they went into an house. 20 And the multitude cometh together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread. 21 And when his friends heard of it, they went out to lay hold on him: for they said, He is beside himself. 22 And the scribes which came down from Jerusalem said, He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils. 23 And he called them unto him, and said unto them in parables, How can Satan cast out Satan? 24 And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25 And if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand. 26 And if Satan rise up against himself, and be divided, he cannot stand, but hath an end. 27 No man can enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he will first bind the strong man; and then he will spoil his house. 28 Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme: 29 But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation: 30 Because they said, He hath an unclean spirit.

Thus far the reading of God's sacred word.

Dear congregation, how would you feel if your friends and your relatives, though you were totally sound in mind, actually thought you had lost your mind and accused you of being insane? Or how would you feel if your enemies actually claimed that you were the devil, the you possessed the devil and were in league with Satan himself? Well, that's what we just read to you Jesus experienced and I want to show you tonight what kinds of lessons we can learn from these serious accusations against our Lord and Savior from Mark 3:19b-30.

I'll just read again verses 27 and 28, "No man can enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he will first bind the strong man; and then he will spoil his house. Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme." So our theme tonight is "Learning from Serious Accusations against Jesus," and two thoughts: first, Jesus' friends misunderstanding his zealous actions, verse 20 and 21; and second, the scribes maligning his Spirit's divine power, 22 through 30.

Well, last time we left Jesus and the newly ordained apostles appointed by Jesus to minister with him in the midst of opposition. The Pharisees were getting more and more intense in their hatred of Jesus, his ministry, his words, his actions, and it gets ratcheted up again another major step in the text, the pericope before us this evening. In verse 20 and 21, an even greater multitude is coming together into the house where Jesus was, in fact, so many people that Jesus and the apostles couldn't find time to eat bread. They couldn't break for a meal. They were pressed around on all sides and when his friends heard of it, verse 21 says, they went out to lay hold on him to seize him because they said, "He is beside himself. He's lost his mind. He's gone insane."

That's quite an accusation to make especially against Jesus, the spotless one, and worse, most commentators claim and rightly so, that these friends probably were relatives of Jesus himself. As we would hope to see next time from verses 31 to 35, his brothers were there and probably they and other relatives were misunderstanding his ministry and they were saying, "We've got to stop Jesus. He's ruining his own reputation. He's ruining our reputation. And if he gets arrested by the Pharisees, who knows, they might come after us next." So they tried to lay hold on him. His zeal was getting carried away, they thought. They thought he was losing his mind.

Now that idea that it was his relatives is strengthened also by John 7:5 which tells us that his brothers did not believe in him, and by Proverbs 21:21 which uses this meaning of the same phrase to indicate family members. So being bound to him by earthly ties out of some kind of distorted pity, they tried to lay hold on him because they're convinced he's beside himself. So in their unconverted state, they think that Jesus is some kind of religious fanatic who just throws himself into preaching and healing the multitudes, wasn't sleeping, wasn't eating well, they even thought, "He's really losing it. He's so consumed with zeal for the work of his Father and has so much compassion for people, he's not taking care of himself. He can't even feed his body this way." So they charge him with being out of his mind.

So they weren't coming for a friendly visit with him. They were coming to take hold on him and Mark actually uses that very same expression seven other times in his Gospel and it means to seize him violently and pull him away from these crowds that are pressing in upon him, not even letting him eat, and consequently Jesus leaves them outside, and we'll see in our next message, he distances himself from their authority, from his own relatives and claims that his first allegiance is to do the will of God, "They are my father, my mother, my brothers," he says, "who do the will of God."

Now what practical application can we draw from this serious false accusation? Well, simply this, that still today when people begin to take seriously their souls and their state before God, when they see what sin is and begin to fear God more than man, there are often unspiritual misunderstanding relatives who think they've lost their mind. And God converted me when I was 14 and I went to all my friends and said, "I just cannot be friends with you right now because I'm under deep conviction of sin and I need to find God." My closest friend said this to me, "What in the world happened to you? It's like you're living in a different world. Have you lost your mind?" I wish I had said to him at the time, "Yes, I am living in a different world, a world where God is real, because I feel like I've just come to my right mind. I've come to see things the way they really are." You see, in reality those who don't take their lives and who don't take their spiritual state before God seriously, they're the ones who have lost their mind, not understanding what life is all about.

And Jesus illustrates this so powerfully in the parable of the prodigal son, doesn't he? The world today would say, "He was in his right mind when he took his father's goods, got away with it, spent them on himself. Stand up for yourself. Spend things on yourself. Live for yourself." Today's philosophy but the Bible said that when he came to his wit's end, he was in the pigsty, that he started coming to his right mind when he repented and desired to return to his father. Luke 15:17 says, "When he came to himself," that is when he was restored to a right mind, he said, "How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough to spare and I perish with hunger?" That's when we come to our right mind, when we realize we've left God, when we need God back, when we flee back to God confessing our sin, repenting, saying we're unworthy to be restored but we cannot live without him.

So how ridiculous it is, how wrong it is when the world judges godly people who are concerned about their spiritual relationship with God and says, "You're out of your mind." But how much more wrong it is when they say that of Jesus who was the only one who had a perfectly right mind in this world and never once sinned. Imagine what a humiliating suffering this was for Jesus. His own relatives accusing him of insanity when they themselves did not believe in him, the only Savior of the world. What an irony. What a humiliation.

Maybe some of you sitting here today can identify with this powerfully. Maybe you've had or you still have perhaps even, a husband or a wife or children or parents who despise your spiritual concern, who've called you a religious fanatic. "It's all gone to your head," they say. "You're taking this religion thing of yours too seriously. You're a good man, you're a good girl, you're going to heaven. Don't worry about your relationship with God so much." They might even accuse you of losing your mind.

R. C. Sproul said something very interesting, he said, "It's interesting to me that people who excitedly follow their favorite ballgame teams and show their allegiance plainly are called fans, a word that usually has positive or at least neutral connotations. However, people who follow Christ and show their allegiance to him are likely to be called fanatics, a word with clear negative connotations." I once read that a fanatic is someone who

having lost sight of his goal doubles his efforts to get there. In other words, a fanatic is a person who has no idea where he's going or even why he's going there but he's going there with all of his might. However, if that's a proper definition of a fanatic, it certainly does not fit the Christian. If the definition of a fanatic is someone who is zealous for the faith, I would be proud to be called a fanatic.

Well, if you face this type of persecution, my friend, be of good courage. Your Lord was tempted in all points like as you are, also endured this heavy affliction. In fact, he bore it sinlessly, he bore it humbly. You notice he doesn't have one word of response to this incredible accusation but he has gone through it in order to merit your sanctification when you have to bear this heavy trial in your life. So comfort yourself with this truth, if he went through it sinlessly, he can help you bear it and forgive your sins in the process of bearing it.

But then there's a second deeper accusation which Jesus actually does respond to in verses 22 through 30. Following upon the heels of this painful misunderstanding of his zealous actions, the enemies of Jesus accuse him of being in league with the devil himself. Look at verse 22 with me, "the scribes which came down from Jerusalem said, He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils." And the parallel accounts in Matthew 12 and Luke 11, we read that there was at that moment a special case of demon possession in front of Jesus and when Jesus healed that young man and threw out the demon, a man who was sightless and speechless and healed him, Matthew 11 says or Matthew 12:22-24 says, "Insomuch that the blind and dumb both spoke and saw that all the people were amazed and said, Is not this the Son of David? But when the Pharisees heard it they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils." So when you combine Mark and Matthew and Luke, what's going on here is this: Jesus is showing his mighty power everywhere by casting out demons. It's already the fourth time in the Gospel of Mark alone that he does this, and it's upsetting the Pharisees because they can't deny that Jesus is doing this, they can't deny the fruits. They see the man now speaking and the man, you know, in his right mind, and seeing, so they resort to a blatant lie. They know it's a lie. It's a false slander. It's a false accusation and they say, "It's by Beelzebub," which was a synonym in those days for the devil. "It's by the devil that he casts out devils."

Well, the multitude responded differently. That made the Pharisees, you see, all the more worried and jealous. The multitudes said, "Wow. This is amazing. Is not this the Son of David?" That's the Messiah title, you see. As they watch what's happening and they think back on the Old Testament prophecies, even though they are unlearned people compared to the scribes, they say, "This sounds like the Messiah of the Old Testament. Is not this the Son of David? Could we be beholding the Messiah in our midst?"

It's interesting, Luke keeps it very general. He says, "Some of them said," that is, some of the crowd, "He casteth out devils through Beelzebub." Matthew gets more specific and says it was the Pharisees who said he was possessed with a demon, but Mark gets even more precise and says it was the scribes which came down from Jerusalem who said, "He hath Beelzebub." Now there's no contradiction between these three because the scribes

were part of the Pharisees. They were doctors of the law. They were the specialists in interpreting the Old Testament and so Mark wants to stress this. Those who were most well-versed in theology are the ones who are blatantly spreading this horrendous lie and they know it's a lie, the scribes of the Pharisees, Mark says in another place, so the Pharisees had their own scribes, their own specialists, you might call them theological doctors who were official transcribers of the text of Scripture who had come to occupy a place of official authority in instructing people in God's law, and it was these scribes who know better who said, "He has Beelzebub. The devil possesses him and he casts out demons by the power of the devil." An even Mark tells us it was the scribes who came from Jerusalem but these were the leading scribes, the leading religious leaders of the day.

What an example this shows us of how powerfully people can hate Jesus Christ and hate Christians and will do everything to oppose the kingdom of Christ. How true that is also today. We shouldn't be surprised when false heretical Christianity and the world go out of their way to hurl serious accusation against true, sincere, Christian believers today. If the scribes and the world hated Christ, will not the religious world and the secular world hate his followers still today? Luther wanted to make it the fourth mark of the church, that the church will always suffer persecution. Based on 2 Timothy 3:12, "All they who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."

Well, the substance of the scribes' accusation really has two aspects to it. The first is this: they accused Jesus that he was possessed by the devil. "He hath Beelzebub," verse 22 says. The second is that he was doing his work in union with, under the power of the devil himself. "He hath Beelzebub and by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils."

So let me explain that. In this accusation, the word "Beelzebub" is used. Beelzebub was a synonym for the lead devil called Satan. We read in verse 23 that Jesus "called them unto him, and said unto them in parables, How can Satan cast out Satan?" So obviously Jesus understands the word "Beelzebub" as referring directly to that lead personal devil called Satan. It's a synonym for Satan. That's evident from the parallel passages in Matthew and Luke. And in those days, the word "Beelzebub" referred to a leader, a lord of a mansion or lord of the dwelling, but in this case the Lord of the dwelling of the evil spirits that substantially heads up the family of evil spirits. He who rules them as a man, rules his household. So Satan is the ruler of all his legions, the devils, and the Pharisees are saying, "So what you're doing, Jesus, is you're really possessed by Beelzebub, the lead devil, and by that lead devil you are casting out all these other demons."

Now, of course, this is just a foolish blatant accusation to cause all the people to become confused because obviously they cannot deny that the miraculous was being done by Jesus and in this case Jesus decides, as we read in Proverbs 26, answer a fool according to his folly lest he be wise in his own conceits. So in verse 23 what he does is he calls the Pharisees and the scribes around him and we read in Luke that knowing their thoughts, he calls them around him. Isn't that interesting? He doesn't need to hear the murmuring that they began spreading among the people about his being possessed by the devil because he knows their thinking. He can read their minds. He's the omniscient Savior.

So he calls them to himself and verse 23 says, he says to them in parables. Now that can be a bit confusing because there really aren't any parables here. We think of a parable as being a rather lengthy story to illustrate a basic spiritual truth, but in this case the word "parables" refers to short pungent analogies and illustrations from common experience to make a point. You see, Jesus is going to counter them in a popular way so their consciences will be convicted and so they will be defeated in front of the people. He's going to expose them publicly to themselves and to others.

So in Jesus' long refutation here, what he does is he first asks them a question, then he gives them two illustrations, verses 23 through 26, with a powerful conclusion. Question, two illustrations, conclusion. His question is: how can Satan cast out Satan? That's his opening counter-question, a powerful one. Jesus is saying, "If Beelzebub is the chief of the demons, the devil himself, and you say that demons are really being cast out by me, then real demons are losing their hold upon human personalities so that the devil's grip is being relinquished over them. Why would the devil relinquish his own grip over other people?" Common sense tells you that's ridiculous. Satan's whole goal is that he's committed to possess and regulate and dominate as many human lives as he can so how can Satan suddenly become the defeater of his own kingdom? Your reasoning is foolish. It is fallacious.

Then Jesus gives these two illustrations. First of a kingdom. He says in verse 24, look at it with me, "if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand." If a kingdom is both an organization of human beings and an organism with living relationships between those human beings and those who govern them and lead them, if that kingdom is divided against itself, it won't last. It becomes defenseless. It destroys itself.

Then Jesus proceeds with a second illustration, verse 25, similarly with a household. If a household be divided against itself, that house cannot stand. Same reasoning. What is a household? A household is both an organization of human beings and an organism with living relationships between parents and children and so on, and if each person in the household is set against the other, there's no recognized government, no rules, no recognition of mutual rights, and since everyone then is a law to himself, anarchy will result and a household will crumble.

Again, you see these illustrations cannot be debated. They're obvious. A kingdom divided against itself will fall. A household divided against itself cannot stand. Which leads to the conclusion, verse 26, "if Satan rise up against himself, and be divided, he cannot stand, but hath an end." He will destroy himself. Just like a household and a kingdom will destroy themselves when they're divided, if Satan has risen up against Satan and I'm Satan, as you say, then I will be destroying as Satan, Satan, and Satan will come to an end. Of course, unknown to them Jesus really is the one who destroys Satan but not as Satan but as the Lord of glory.

So Jesus absolutely demolishes their horrendous accusation and then in verse 27, he moves on now to a true explanation of what really happened when this young man suddenly could talk and could see and the demon was gone. This is what he says really happened, verse 27, "No man can enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he will first bind the strong man; and then he will spoil his house." And Jesus is saying, of course, "I'm the strong man. I'm the stronger one than Satan. I've entered into a strong man's house, a man who is possessed with a demon, and the demon is strong, the demon has control over this man, but I've spoiled his goods, but in order to do that, I've had to bind the strong man and cast him out, and then I've spoiled his goods."

So Jesus is saying, "Do you want the real answer to the question of how the demon went out of that man who was previously blind and speechless? That demon didn't go out by a demon, that demon didn't go out by himself, that demon went out under the control of him who has control over demonic powers and his name is Jesus of Nazareth who spoke the word of exorcism and commanded the demon to come out and in his hand are all things. He's the stronger than the strong man. He's almighty. That's me."

Well, this was just a pattern in Jesus' life. Jesus was always doing this. He was always winning the battle against Satan. From the moment he was ordained into ministry, Satan took him for 40 days out into the desert and tempted him in all kinds of ways, three major ways, and Jesus got the victory over them all. And then already in Mark we've seen several occasions when the devil would seek to use the vocal chords of those he possessed to give a forced confession of Jesus' identity and you remember what Jesus said to them? "Be muzzled." He actually closed the mouth of the devil within the demon possessed. "The prince of this world," he said, "is now cast out," which is Satan. And again and again in his life, in his ministry, in his death, think of Hebrews 2, in his death he has the power to destroy him who had the power of death. As Satan was biting at his heel, Jesus was crushing the head of the serpent and getting the victory and making full satisfaction for the sins of his people and that was declared victorious in the resurrection, and one day he'll come in the clouds and defeat Satan forever and cast the strong man armed bound into hell where he will rule, Jesus will rule over the pit of darkness. So Jesus is always mightier than Satan for Satan is only a fallen angel. I mean, a fallen angel, an angel is powerful but Jesus is the Lord of lords. He's the Creator of the angels. That is the reason. That is the simple, comforting, powerful explanation for why the blind and the speechless man could now see and speak because Jesus is the strongest. He's the Lord and the devils must flee in his presence.

Now what does all this have to say to us today? Well, I'm gonna just press home two obvious applications that lie on the surface of this passage. First, this passage presents us with a horrible picture of the human heart and the human mind when it's deceived by empty religion. These scribes of the Pharisees, they see everything that the common multitudes see. The common multitudes began to see, "This must be the Son of David." But the scribes in their feigned ignorance say, "He hath Beelzebub and by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils." A little child could reason through that foolishness but Jesus exposes them, exposes them blatantly that their reasoning about him is ridiculously false, but you know, dear friends, when we really study this passage and we think about

what our natural hearts are, we also conjure up in our minds all kinds of false ideas about who Jesus is and if we're honest we'd have to say, "O God, left to the conclusion of my own heart, I wouldn't do anything better. My heart is so determined to maintain its own dependence, it so fights against who Jesus is in its pride, in its self-righteousness, that I too by nature am unwilling to take the posture of a needy, unclean, undone sinner before Jesus Christ, just like these scribes refuse to do that, and I too refuse to see that all my hope and my only hope and my sufficient hope and my glorious hope of salvation lies exclusively in Jesus Christ."

So I too, I too live with conclusions as irrational, as nonsensical as the ones with which these scribes of the Pharisees made and some of us are sitting here tonight, I'm afraid, living with foolish conclusions about Jesus Christ, in some ways as foolish as these scribes and I know you can't imagine that but week after week after week after week from this pulpit you hear the full Gospel that Jesus is a willing Savior for the greatest of sinners in hundreds of ways from hundreds of texts, and yet some of you are still saying, "Wow, that would be presumptuous for me, presumptuous for me to believe in him alone for salvation," when Jesus is repeatedly saying to you it's presumptuous for anyone not to believe in him for that only leads to hell and damnation and is the height of foolishness not to throw yourself as an empty sinner at the feet of Jesus and cry out, "Son of David, have mercy upon me! I cannot save myself."

So what is the bottom line? Well, either you still don't understand the Gospel after all these decades of preaching that he delights to save the greatest of sinners, that he will never refuse one sinner who comes to him for salvation, either you still don't understand that or else you love your sin so much that if you're to die today, you'd rather die in your sin and go to hell than to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ alone for salvation. What a tragedy. What a tragedy. Or maybe it's both. But you see, this is the point: you're unwilling to leave either your sin of unbelief or maybe some other sin, some lust, or some passion, or some self-righteousness, maybe you're like the scribes and Pharisees, that you're so self-righteous, so repugnant in your own religiosity that you refuse to do anything other than the Pharisee. Oh, you won't say it like this but the Pharisees did, they said, "We're not the Gentile dogs. We're Abraham's seed." So they built on the wrong foundation, foundation apart from Jesus Christ.

My friend, I'll tell you one more time tonight, if you build your salvation on anything in this world but Jesus Christ, you are today on your way to everlasting destruction. There is no other Savior. There is no other name given among men under heaven whereby we must, not maybe, not hope one day to be, must be saved. Please, please care about your own soul. Please hear the Gospel. Please receive it as a poor sinner and fall upon it. Stop dodging the truth. The truth is you will not leave your sin of self-sufficiency, of pride, of lust, ambition, greed, whatever it is, but what a horrible thing it is when the human heart in the face of the gracious Son of God who is God's strong man, who has come not to shut us up in a prison house called the Christian life but to set us free from the devil and the liberty of the Christian life, what a tragedy when we would still rather call Jesus something entirely false, acting like we're more willing to be saved than he is to save us when we know the opposite is the truth, than to be set free from the one who's got us in

his prison house, the devil. Oh, may you become a lost, guilty sinner before God and lose your independence and lose all your filthy ragged righteousness and throw yourself poor and needy at his feet and say, "I can't do anything else. If I perish, I perish but I'm going to perish at the feet of Jesus because he is my only hope and the only salvation." That is what you need.

But the second application is that this passage not only presents a horrible picture of the human heart and the mind deceived by empty religion, but it presents a wonderful display of the person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. 1 John 3:8 puts it this way, "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil." Now don't misunderstand me here, though unconverted people today are seldom demon possessed in the sense that this young man was that just got healed in our text, we are all by nature devil controlled and there's a difference. Ephesians 2 puts it well, "You hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins wherein time past you walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." Jesus puts it even more bluntly, John 8:44, "Ye are of your father, the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do."

So my dear unconverted friend, the way to get out from under the devil's control and the only way is to have the stronger one than the strong man do his work in your heart. The one who conquered Satan in his life, his death, his resurrection, he can conquer all satanic influence also in you. In fact, the parallel passage, Luke 11:22 puts it this way, "He can take from you all the armor wherein you trust." The armor wherein you trust. So I've got good news for you, great news for you, Gospel news for you: Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the stronger one, can take away your armor including your blinding veil so that you will see the Gospel and see that you're without hope until you're in Christ and flee to him. He can tear all your chains away and set you free from Satan's imprisoning grasp. He can bring you to sit at Jesus' feet in your right mind, clothed with his righteousness. He can take away the hot iron of your indifference and insensibility and give you a tender conscience that mourns over sin, a conscience that will be comforted with his salvific work alone.

He can break the power of the loins of sin and gird you about with the loins of truth, truth in your soul, truth in your mind, truth in your life, truth in your mouth. He can make you willing to buy the truth and refuse to sell it. He can break the spirit of worldliness within you so that the world loses all its fair colors and you're girded with the power of godliness in him so that he becomes your Alpha and Omega. He can break the power of enmity against God within you and arm you with feet shod with the Gospel of peace so you experience peace that passes all understanding in him. He can break the power of stubborn unbelief. He can shield you with the shield of faith so that faith will reign within you and unbelief will no longer have dominion over your soul. He can break the power of ignorance in you before it destroys you for your lack of knowledge and replace it with a helmet of salvation so that you understand the Bible both law and Gospel, as never before. He can break down your pride and impenitence and arm you with the sword of the word of God which will teach you genuine repentance, and by his Spirit enable you to

walk with that kind of humility we heard about this morning, humbly with your God in lowliness of mind, esteeming everyone else higher than yourself.

Jesus Christ can do everything you need to have done for you. He can change your want, your can, your could, your cannot, and your could not because he's the stronger one than the strong man. So if you sit bound to your fears of bondage to yourself, to your own inability, bound to your own unwillingness, bound to your own depravity, feeling the lash of the strong devil himself who lashes you with those terrible lashes of unrequited guilt, Jesus Christ can snatch you, snatch that whip out of Satan's hand for he bore in his own body the wrath of God against sin. He took all the lashes for you, dear sinner, needy, fearful sinner, so you could be set free. So fleeing to him, fleeing to the fountain opened by his precious blood, you can be released from the prison house of guilt, you can step out into the liberty of the forgiving and cleansed sons and daughters of God by the power of his Spirit.

So the question to you is why do you despise so gracious, so strong a Savior? Why do you remain indifferent to so mighty a Deliverer? He's come to do now what he did then, to set at liberty the captives. He's done it for millions of people, why can't he do it for you? And some of you young people, and older ones too, why do you believe the lie that the quickest way to bondage is to become a true Christian? That's a lie of the devil. The devil says, "Become a Christian, you've got to stop doing this and stop doing that and start doing this and doing all kinds of things. You can't watch stuff on the media anymore. You can't do this." No. My friend, take it from many of us who have been on both sides of this question. The devil is a cruel master, Christ is a gracious Lord. Yes, he'll win your heart, he'll take away the desire to do things that you loved before and he'll give you new loves that you hated before. His yoke is easy. His burden is light. Don't believe his lies that keep you in the devil's prison house and locked up.

The unconverted life is so tiny. You've got no bigger god than yourself. The Christian life is huge and illimitable because we serve the living God the universe. Come to him who does for sinners what they cannot do for themselves. That's the Gospel. He can give you faith and repentance, Acts 5:31, to believe in him; to repent before him who is the sum and substance of the Gospel. No, we will never tell you that can do something for yourself but we do tell you to go to him to do it all for you in his grace, in his mercy. He's the strong one, the strongest one. He can deliver you.

So blessed be God, Jesus did not have the spirit of Beelzebub, actually he had the Spirit, the Holy Spirit of the Lord God upon him and it's interesting, fascinating actually, that in Matthew 12:28, the parallel passage, Jesus says, "If I cast out devils by the Spirit of God," the Holy Spirit, "then the kingdom of God is come unto you." So where Christ is present by the Spirit breaking, the Holy Spirit breaking the power of the devil's spirit, there is God's kingdom coming into the hearts and lives of men.

Now thank God many of you know what that's like. You've sat for many years in this church perhaps with the devil sitting beside you, gloating in the fact that he had you safely in his place of capture, but then God came and the Holy Spirit came, the Spirit of

Jesus Christ, and showed you who you were and drove you to Jesus Christ and you received him by his grace and you were set free, not because you were clever, not because of anything you did, but because of the strong one, the grace and power of Jesus. So, my friend, if you're still unconverted tonight, please cry, plead to him, throw yourself upon him and you, dear child of God, oh, live up to what God has made you, his free man, that you might be Christ's bondsman, bound yet free, bound to him in cords of love and cords of affection. He wins us by his power. He makes us new creations. He makes us to fall in love with him by the power of the Spirit of God.

So that's what this passage is all about, that the Spirit's power is greater than Satan's power. Jesus is not doing Satan's work. The enemies are wrong, he's doing God's work. Jesus' ministry is not an exercise of demonic power, it's an exercise of the Holy Spirit's power. Praise be to God, Jesus has bound Satan. Satan is powerless. Jesus' ministry is not Satan's power, it's Satan's undoing. Thanks be to God.

And now finally we reach the apex of this history. Jesus says something very solemn now to this crowd gathered around him. "Verily I say unto you." That's an oath form. That's like saying, "Amen. I swear by myself, this shall certainly be." And the crowd goes quiet. They realize that something unusual is happening, something very solemn, very majestic, very important is going to come out of the mouth of the Lord Jesus Christ. Everything he said up until now has defeated their arguments completely but now comes the weighty matter, the solemn, the serious thing. Then he speaks, "All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme: But he that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation: Because they said, He hath an unclean spirit."

So we need to ask two questions here, two important questions. First of all, what is blasphemy? And secondly, what is the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit? Well, blasphemy is to speak words against God out of defiant irreverence; to despise and desecrate his character by insult, by mockery, by dishonor. It's the opposite of praise. Instead of praising God, we despise him. Even casually, of course, we can even when we say things like, "Oh my God!" we can desecrate the name of God. It's a form of, a mild form perhaps of blasphemy. And we can be very thankful that the unpardonable sin is not for every kind of blasphemy because Jesus says, "Blasphemy shall be forgiven wherewith which men blaspheme God." So all of us, all of us at many times in many ways have routinely blasphemed the name of God and we still have forgiveness to be found. Thank God that all sin shall be forgiven unto the sons of men. J. C. Ryle says of this text, "This proposes to man free pardon, full forgiveness, complete remission without money and without price. Lay hold on this doctrine without delay."

But secondly, what does it then mean to commit blasphemy against the Spirit because that's what Jesus goes on to talk about as the unpardonable sin. Well, blasphemy against the Spirit is a willful slander of God's redemptive work of the Spirit through the Son knowingly and continually resisting the Spirit's work and calling it the devil's work. Let me say that again, blasphemy against the Spirit is a willing slander of God's redemptive work of the Spirit through the Son knowingly and continually resisting the Spirit's work,

calling it the devil's work. It's a slander of God's redemption. It's not just an attack on the person of the Holy Spirit, it's attack on the work that the Holy Spirit is doing in saving sinners.

Jesus is angry with that. He's speaking of the Holy Spirit here as the engine of his own ministry, that ministry that is bringing redemption to God's people. He says in Matthew 12:28, "If I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come unto you." And Jesus doesn't take it lightly when the scribes of the Pharisees don't just misunderstand this and don't just doubt it and don't just reject it, but slander it and call the work of the Spirit the work of the devil. Jesus is saying that, "What you've just said has risen from the very stench of hell, it's the very activity and the invention of Satan. In alleging that the power of my ministry, by my Spirit, is a demonic satanic power, the scribes have slandered the Triune God's beautiful redemption of sinners." What makes their sin so serious is that it was a willful knowing slander steeped in lies. They had seen the miracle, the same miracle the people had seen, they knew that what they were saying was not true, they knew that it was the work of God and they called it the work of the devil.

So Jesus goes on in the parallel passage in Matthew 12:32 and he makes this rather astonishing statement, almost puzzling statement. He says this, "Anyone who speaks a word," Matthew 12:32, "against the Son of Man it will be forgiven him, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit it will not be forgiven him either in this age or in the age to come." Now when you read that, the first thing you think is somehow it's worse to blaspheme the Holy Spirit than to blaspheme the Son of Man, which is Jesus, but we need to remember as we saw in our earlier sermons twice on Mark, that the Son of Man though it's Jesus' preferred title for himself during his earthly ministry, it's a rather mysterious title. It's drawn from Daniel 7. It's not a prominent title in the Old Testament. It's not like Messiah or Son of David, for example. And Jesus used the title Son of Man to obscure his identity so that he could reveal that identity only to people whom he chose at the time he chose. And since the title Son of Man is mysterious, it's conceivable, perfectly conceivable that people could blaspheme the Son of Man, that is they could speak against him and his work without really realizing the extent of what they're doing, they're not doing it maliciously but doing it ignorantly. And these same people might one day have it revealed to them by the Spirit who the Son of Man really was and what he came to do and then by God's grace repent and find forgiveness, but to blaspheme the Holy Ghost was different, you see. When the Spirit moved, it was clear who was at work. Those scribes knew this was the work of God. When demons were sent shrieking for refuge, it was clear that God himself put them to flight. The power of the Holy Spirit's work is crystal clear.

So to blaspheme the Holy Spirit did not involve blaspheming in ignorance, it involved blaspheming in full knowledge of who it was that you were blaspheming and so what's happening here was that those particular scribes, I'm not saying all scribes, those particular scribes who were laying these charges at the feet of Jesus, had profoundly hardened their hearts against his ministry and sealed their consciences shut to the Gospel

in open and bitter rebellion against the Lord Jesus Christ. They had become so hardened that they would never turn and repent and would never find forgiveness.

Now notice this passage actually does not literally say that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit cannot be forgiven, it says that it will not be forgiven. The power of Jesus Christ is powerful enough, of course, to forgive any sin but the point is this: these scribes were so hardened, has so sealed their conscience that it was as if the day of salvation was past while they were still in this life. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is a willful, bitter, knowing slander of the Spirit and his work of applying redemption, calling it the work of the devil when you know it's the work of the Lord.

That's why Jesus himself gives the explanation in the last verse of our text, "Because they said, He hath an unclean spirit." That's why it's called the unpardonable sin. It's a dreadful, damnable sin, a sin of which we as human beings should never accuse another person because we don't know, we can't see the heart. There can be people of grossly distorted views of Christianity, other religions, or some cult or there's some sect who may commit the sin but we don't know. Or who get saved, who openly and viciously seem to slander the Gospel and yet get saved. So we have to be careful saying someone has committed this sin. Actually the Apostle Paul should stop our lips of judging people against this sin because prior to his conversion Paul was a Pharisee. He hated the church. He delighted in persecuting Christians. He looks like a perfect candidate for the unpardonable sin. In Acts 7, he presided over the execution of Stephen, the first man to die for being a Christian. In Acts 8, he's hunting down more Christians, driving them to prison. In Acts 9, we read he's breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord and then God mows him down and converts him. Acts 9, he becomes the greatest missionary, perhaps the greatest Christ-like man the Lord Jesus has ever given to his church.

So if Saul can do what Saul did and Paul can do what Paul did, we never can have the confidence to accuse anyone of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit in the sense that Jesus means it in this passage. This is a sin that goes beyond our boundaries to discern. We can be suspicious. We can say, "There's extreme hatred, a bitterness against God here," but yet we cannot say that someone has done that because we don't know another man's internal thoughts. Jesus does.

So if we don't know who has committed it, what can we do with this? How can we apply this to ourselves today? Well, I want to conclude this sermon with three thoughts. First, if you've ever feared that you've committed the unforgivable sin, you haven't. That's what our forefathers have consistently said and that's biblical. You see, this sin reveals a heart that's entirely entirely sealed shut in open, blatant, bitter defiance against God. Those who have committed it never fear God in any way. There's no fear of God before their eyes, only bitter hatred. So thank God that he will never allow a true believer to commit the unpardonable sin and if you think you have, you haven't.

Secondly, the fact that the scribes and the Pharisees did commit this blasphemy against the Holy Spirit shows the intensity of the opposition that Jesus faced in his earthly

ministry. These people are not simply confused, they're not well-meaning misguided men, they're bitter bitter enemies of Jesus. You see, a person who commits the unpardonable sin is so bitter against the Gospel, so bitter against Jesus that they're not even concerned so much about their own well-being like the natural man is selfishly oriented, but their whole passion in life is to destroy the work of God, calling it the work of the devil. It's a bitter bitter enmity. Men whose hearts are raging with the flames of hell and who are bent not just in keeping Jesus quiet but destroying him and destroying the redemption that he brings, hating Jesus, hating the Gospel with every ounce that there is within them. But that's the opposition Jesus had to face. How incredible. What depths he had to go to to save people like you and me. How he had to suffer even before he went to the cross.

And finally and most importantly, my last application is that ultimately this passage has more to do with verse 27 than it does with the unpardonable sin, especially these last words. Really they're the apex of the whole passage, "He will spoil his house." Jesus has bound Satan. He will spoil his house. Satan has no more dominion or sway over the children of God. Jesus has paid the full price to the justice of God for their sins and so hell and hell's king have no claim upon the people of God. There is real freedom in the Gospel because the old slave master now wears the chains himself. Satan is bound and the Gospel goes free. Revelation 20. And the Son of God is spoiling and plundering Satan's house, setting free those whom God has loved from before the beginning of the world. What a victory we have in Jesus Christ. That's the point, and that victory is all the greater when you consider what a sordid and checkered history we all have in our lives.

You know, Christ made our soul in Adam like a palace inside our beautiful body. We were once perfect in Adam, no palace so clean, spotless, perfect as our created soul in Adam. We were the masterpiece, the crown of creation. Our bodies too, the palace of all creation. But we took a sledgehammer to this palace. We destroyed ourselves in our deep tragic fall in Adam when our covenant head obeyed Satan, the great destroyer of the human race. So we lost the image of God. We turned our knowledge into ignorance, our righteous into unrighteousness, our holiness into perversity. We turned order into confusion, the beauties of holiness into gross impurities, a palace of prayer and praise into a den of thieves, a heart of love to God into a factory of idols, and our entire soul and then body became like the ruined palace of a great prince, leaving only behind shattered remains and faded glory. But astonishingly, God didn't just leave us there as he did the fallen angels, the devils themselves, but he comes to conquer us, to conquer us fully, not to conquer half a heart, to conquer our mind, our entire heart, our body, our soul, all of which were before in the service of sin and Satan but now are dedicated to the Triune God by making us new creations to the everlasting joy of our newborn souls that now hunger and thirst after his righteousness and love him and find all in him. He spoils Satan's house.

Now that doesn't mean that we're done with the struggle of sin, against sin. It doesn't mean you have no more trouble with Satan. You know, when John Newton became old and nearly blind, one of his older colleagues in the ministry read him 1 Corinthians 15:10a, "by the grace of God I am what I am," and Newton paused and then he said this,

"Yes, yes sir, I am not what I ought to be, I am not what I hope to be, but I am not what I once was. By the grace of God I am what I am." Can you say that too tonight? By the grace of God. Do you grieve that you are not yet what you ought to be, still imperfect, deficient, prone to backslide? Do you grieve that you are not what you hope to be in the great day when you may put off all mortality and all sin and all corruption? But then can you also add this, "Thanks be to God. I'm not. I really am not what I once was, a slave of sin and Satan. Yes, yes, by the grace of God I am what I am. By the grace of God a stronger man than Satan visited me and conquered the priceless palace of my soul. By the grace of God, O God help me, I will never go back to Satan again." Does the strong man have the first place within you? Is Satan cast out and just trying to get back in? Or is he only temporarily walking around you only to return later with seven additional evil spirits as the parallel passage in Luke 11 says?

You see how dreadful it is when Satan comes as an angel of light but there's no exchange of masters. That's what we heard about actually this morning, of national Israel. You see, it's quite possible to be mastered by a religious Satan rather than a worldly Satan and then so much changes outwardly in our lives, the house of our heart may be swept from the common pollutions by forced confessions like Pharaoh, or by false repentance like Ahab, or by partial reform like Herod, but the problem is that the house is only swept, it's not washed. Outward reformation removes the loose dirt but besetting sin remains untouched. We may then live a life swept of the sin of lying perhaps, swept of a life that seems to others to be open to the word of God, but our heart may still not be washed from its filthiness, from the dominion of sin, still not be made to abhor itself, to love Christ, to pursue holiness.

So this is a critical question: who is the King of the priceless palace of your soul? Christ or the devil? If it's Christ, you're a genuine Christian. You're free because Jesus says so. So stop listening to, stop obeying, stop serving, stop overestimating a demon who's in chains, who's bound, who's contemptible, and start believing in the freedom of the Gospel, freedom by the Spirit to seek after obedience, to seek after righteousness, freedom in the one who makes us free, who says when the Son of Man sets you free, you shall be free indeed, and use that freedom to live as we heard this morning for the glory of God. Hallowed be thy name. Amen.

Great God of heaven, please be that strong one, Lord Jesus, by thy Spirit setting prisoners free even tonight, free from the prison house of sin, the bondage of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye and the pride of life, and take them captive. Spoil the house of Satan and gather them unto thyself and gain the victory and make them new creations and give that thy people may live as the genuine free men that they are, bound to Jesus, bound to him being united with him, having communion with him, living out of him and to him and through him and by him and for him and unto him, to whom be all the glory. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

SUNDAY EVENING

Dr. Joel R. Beeke

Votum and Salutation

Psalter 325

Scripture Reading: Mark 3:19b-35

Reading of the Westminster

Confession of Faith, 29:4-6

Prayer

Psalter 200

Sermon Text: Mark 3:19b-35

Series on Mark (23)

Learning from Serious Mistakes about Jesus

1. *Jesus' friends misunderstanding His zealous actions (vv. 20-21)*
2. *The scribes misrepresenting His divine power (vv. 22-30)*
3. *The multitude misconstruing His true family (vv. 31-35)*

Psalter 254:4, 5 to the tune of 210 (standing)

Sermon Conclusion

Closing Prayer

Psalter 238

Doxology (Psalter 196)

Benediction

1. How could Jesus be charged with insanity by His friends and relatives?

2. How can the insanity charge against Jesus be a great encouragement for believers who are persecuted by their friends and relatives for taking Christ and the Christian faith seriously?

3. What exactly was the charge of the scribes against Jesus when they called him "Beelzebub"?

4. What was Jesus' threefold response to being charged with being in league with the devils?

5. How can we define the unpardonable sin?

6. How can we be sure that we have not committed the unpardonable sin?

7. Who are Jesus' true family? Why? Do you belong to His family?