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**Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York**

**May 3, 2020**

**The Unforgivable Sin**

**Selected Scriptures**

**Prayer:** *Again Father, we just thank you for gathering us together. Again I thank you for this communion Sunday where we focus in on you. We just again pray for an extra measure of your Holy Spirit's presence. Lord, guide us through the wonderful task of opening up your book and learning at a deeper level just what it is you've done for us in your life and your death on the cross. I pray your Holy Spirit would accompany us in this journey and that you would again make it of permanent value. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well once again it's the first Sunday of the month and again this is the day that we remember Jesus Christ and his cross. Jesus on the night before he died he met with his disciples, and there for the last time he celebrated a Passover supper with them. Matthew 26 describes it, it says: *Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it,*

*all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."* Jesus took bread and he took wine and he offered them up as symbols of his flesh and his blood and then he asked the disciples to eat the bread and drink the cup so that they might symbolically be eating his flesh and drinking his blood. And then he asked them to repeat the remembrance of this sacrifice on a regular basis and that's what we do, we do it once a month, we call it "the Lord's supper" or "the Lord's table." And we celebrate it once a month by meditating on what it is the Lord Jesus Christ did for us on the cross, by examining ourselves, examining our conscience, asking God's Spirit who is now within us to convict us of sin, by then confessing our sins and then participating in the elements. *John 6:53 says: So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."*

Well we are still early in the gospel of Mark. Jesus has just returned from his confrontation with Satan in the desert and immediately he begins engaging the kingdom of darkness. And we quickly see that within days Jesus becomes a man under siege. His first task is to assemble his disciples and while he's going about

that task, he begins teaching and preaching in the synagogue and he begins healing miraculously among the crowds. And right from the beginning the Pharisees notice the threat that Jesus poses to the kingdom that they had created. I mean they were the ones who were spiritually in charge. They were the ones who made the rules. God was reduced to a series of rules and rituals and cleansings, to strict attention to the letter of the law while ignoring the spirit behind it. And along comes Jesus and they can sense right off the bat that he's about to turn their world upside down. So right from the start the Pharisees are armed for bear.

We pick up where we ended last time. Jesus is teaching in the synagogue where he meets with a demon-infested congregant who he heals. Well the response that he gets from the Pharisees points out that he's fighting a war but he's fighting it on two different fronts. I mean he's fighting directly with the demons who are controlling the man and he's fighting also with the religious leaders who see Jesus as a threat to their order. I mean one part of the conflict is dealing with the demons directly, the other part is dealing with their foot soldiers who just happened to be masquerading as religious leaders. And they use a man with a shriveled hand now as a foil. They decide they want to confront Jesus within the synagogue itself with a violation of the Sabbath. They claim that there are no healings allowed on the Sabbath

because in their view that's what they considered to be work. Jesus, knowing their motives, he calls the man with a shriveled hand right up to the front, and right in front of everybody he heals him. And then he castigates the Pharisees, saying, in *Matthew 12:11: "Which one of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."*

Well as I said last time, Jesus, he basically goes to the familiar every day world that all of them including the Pharisees live in. They all know exactly what they would do if a sheep had fallen into a pit on the Sabbath and they know they don't have a leg to stand on. And once again Jesus exceeds in making them look foolish and petty, but this time he doesn't stop just there. Verse 5 says: *And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored.* Again this is a pattern that repeats itself over and over again with Jesus. He demonstrates to the Pharisees his extraordinary power and wisdom including even his miracles and they in turn simply harden their hearts and dig in their heels, and thus we have this ongoing series of conflicts.

I want you to picture what it must have been like for Jesus. Just picture the scene. He's come back from the desert where after forty days of intense battle as it were, he's doing battle after having fasted for forty days with a hideous monster who's more clever and powerful than anything else in the created universe. He begins preaching in the synagogue and he finds a congregant infected with some of the very same demons that he had just dealt with in the desert. He's also engaged in combat with the religious leaders who are wittingly or unwittingly acting as Satan's foot soldiers, and now we have a conflict over healing a man on the Sabbath. Well the religious leaders, they're determined to use this man with a shriveled hand as a means to even the score. And when that fails miserably their response is literally murderous. Verse 6 says: *The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.*

So Jesus comes from this battle in the desert, he now finds himself in the middle of a firefight with the devils' foot soldiers and he still has this task of gathering together his disciples. He goes on to say in verse 7: *Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the sea.* Well here at least Jesus could find some refuge, he could find some kind of way to come apart from the hostility of both the spirit world and the religious leaders and here he could kind of re-charge his batteries and get to know the disciples that he's

already gathered, get to bring in the remainder of the twelve. It would be a time of rest and withdrawal with his disciples, or so he thought. *Mark 3:7-12* says: *And a great crowd followed, from Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem and Idumea and from beyond the Jordan and from around Tyre and Sidon. When the great crowd heard all that he was doing, they came to him. And he told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, lest they crush him, for he had healed many, so that all who had diseases pressed around him to touch him.* I want you to think about that last statement. Here's Jesus and he's telling his disciples to have a boat ready so that if the crowd gets so huge and so threatening that if he's literally in danger of getting crushed, he can jump into the boat and have his disciples row him out into the water. I just want you to picture a 21st century reaction to this Jesus. I mean how we would relate to this? We would say, Jesus, a rowboat? These crowds are going to crush you and you're going to hop into a rowboat? Jesus, you are God incarnate. I mean why don't you do what Spiderman does, why don't you just leap 300 feet into the air and just swing from mountaintop to mountaintop in front of the crowd or maybe do something like Superman does, you can just kind of zoom up into the sky until you disappear like a dot and come flying right back down and hover some 15 feet over the crowd. You can address them from that position. Imagine what that would do. Imagine the attention you would get. I mean why in the world would

you do something so prosaic as hop in a boat when we know you can walk on water? I mean certainly hovering above the crowd is not above your pay grade, is it, Jesus? Many a times I've heard people say, why doesn't God just do a miracle? I mean people would believe in him if he just did a miracle, I mean, why is Jesus so hesitant to use the miraculous? Why doesn't he just write the gospel in the sky so everybody can see it and believe it? Well the simple answer is that Jesus is not here to be a Superman. He's here as the Good Shepherd. Jesus didn't need miracles to bring people into his kingdom. You see he merely spoke the truth as the Good Shepherd and his sheep heard his voice and they followed him. The miraculous was between Jesus and his Father who was the one who gave him the sheep in the first place. I mean Jesus could have done thousands of miracles and it would not have changed one single heart. You see that was his Father's task. Jesus stated as much when the crowds began grumbling. This is *John 6:42*. *They said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?" Jesus answered them, "Do not grumble among yourselves. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day."* You see if anything miracles oftentimes make it harder for people to come into the kingdom. I mean Jesus knew and his disciples very quickly learned that miracles caused people to be attracted not necessarily to Jesus but more so to the

miracles. I mean the huge crowd that followed him, they were not interested in the Good Shepherd. They were interested in a magic show and a free meal, and especially the free meal. And again that's not my observation, that's Jesus'. This is what he said in *John 6:26*. It says: *Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal."*

See miracles, they were also very dangerous. They tended to have binary results. I mean if a heart was open and it was soft, it was all that was needed to usher them into the kingdom. To hearts that were hard and embittered, it merely increased the bitterness. I mean the Pharisees had already seen the miracle of the man with the shriveled hand and what do they do? They decide they're going to ally themselves with the hated Herodians for a common enemy, and that enemy was Jesus. I mean not only was Jesus fighting a battle against the religious leaders, he's simultaneously at war with the demons themselves. We pick up at Mark's gospel at verse 9. It says: *And he told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, lest they crush him, for he had healed many, so that all who had diseases pressed around him to touch him. And*



*whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, "You are the son of God." And he strictly ordered them not to make him known.*

Why do you suppose Jesus rejected the testimony of demons? I mean they were after all acknowledging that he was God, they were acknowledging who he was. Well again, this is a war and this is a war that's being fought on many different fronts. I mean the demons know that they are up against a vastly superior force, that God is confronting them, they have no choice but to fall down and acknowledge a God who they now hate, but don't think for a second that they're doing this for Jesus' good. And Jesus categorically rejects any part with them including their acknowledgment which we'll soon see as something that the Pharisees use for their ends. Again we pick up on verse 13. It says: *And he went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him. And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons. He appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, sons of thunder); Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. Then he went*

home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying "He is out of his mind." What a picture this paints of the siege that Jesus finds himself in the middle of. I mean he seeks to leave for the sea for the rest and relaxation that it could afford and he's surrounded by crowds so huge that they physically threatened to crush him. He's confronted by hordes of demons acknowledging his power and seeking one last time to do him harm and now he comes down from the mountain with a motley crew known as his disciples and immediately he's thrown right back into the center of the crowd. And now he's got three different lines of battle: He's got the demons on one side, he's got the religious leaders who are plotting to kill him on the other side and right there in the middle he's got this band of men who he'll spend the next three years disciplining who are at this point as raw and as vulnerable as they will ever be. I mean remember, this is the same group of twelve who after three years of day in, day out ministry from Jesus himself still got into a knock down, drag out brawl the night before Jesus died over which one of them was going to be the big cheese in the new kingdom. This was after three years of Jesus' presence. Jesus in the midst of this battle, having been with these disciples probably for about three weeks. And to top it off he now gets this "endorsement" -- quote, unquote -- from his family and friends. And when his family heard it, they went out to

*seize him, for they were saying, "He is out of his mind." You know it's one thing to have demons attack you, it's another thing to have the religious leaders attack you while you're still assembling those whom you are going to disciple, it's another thing entirely to have the very ones who know you and love you reject the very mission that you're undertaking. These were the people who Jesus grew up with. These were the ones who knew him as a child. Jesus' own household had sheep within it who never heard his voice, at least not until after he had gone to the cross. I mean we know that James, his own physical brother didn't believe at first and we also know that when Jesus was in the midst of his ministry, his own family or at least part of his family rejected him. We even have an account of where once they tried to get him to go to a feast to do a miracle show because they didn't believe who he was and they wanted him to put on a show. This is *John 7*. It says: *Now the Jew's Feast of Booths was at hand. So his brothers said to him, "Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples may also see the works you are doing. For no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If -- big "if" -- if you do these things, show yourself to the world."* For not even his brothers believed in him.*

So here's Jesus, he's at the start of his ministry, he's got demons to the left of him, he's got hate-filled religious zealots to the right of him, his own family is convinced that he's out of his

mind, and in the midst of this is this new group of disciples that Jesus is committed to protecting and teaching and growing. He's beset by a huge unimaginable crowd that are genuinely threatening and he's telling his disciples, get a boat ready in case I get crushed. No miraculous leap to a mountaintop, no miraculous hovering 15 feet above the crowd, just a simple prosaic escape route for a simple shepherd who was gathering his sheep.

Consider this morning a Christ beset on all sides. And I was just thinking, at what point does Jesus think, you know, I'm the king of the universe. I'm the creator of the universe. At any given time there's over a hundred million angels who are worshiping me. I have the eternal love of my Father and the Holy Spirit. I don't need this. Thank God Jesus never reached that point. Instead consider the humility that brings the King of the universe not to the miraculous but to a boat to avoid being crushed, and he's doing it all for his sheep.

And consider also this warning God gives us about taking communion. This is *1 Corinthians 11*. God says: *But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we*

would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world. Again I say this every month, I say communion is extremely serious business and to enter into it in an unworthy manner regardless of whether you're here in the church or at home is to literally court disaster. And I said if you're not absolutely confident that you are a child of the King, if you haven't by faith trusted in Christ as your Savior, if you haven't first reconciled with your brother and sister before you bring the sacrifice of your presence and your life to this altar, then just pass the elements on. If you don't feel right about participating, then err on the side of caution. Get right with God first. But on the other hand we can make the mistake of thinking that we have to be spotlessly perfect, and unless we're spotlessly perfect we're not fit to receive communion. The devil loves that one as well because that too is a mistake. You see, being a child of the King doesn't mean that you don't sin and it doesn't mean that you never fail. It means that you recognize that the salvation you've received is a gift and it's a gift that no one is capable of earning by being good.

And so again we repeat Dane Ortlund's quote. He says: "In the kingdom of God, the one thing that qualifies you is knowing that you don't qualify, and the one thing that disqualifies you is

thinking that you do." And it also means that when we do fail we are aware of the fact that we have sinned and we're aware of it because now God's spirit is living inside us. It's God's spirit inside us who convicts us and so we grieve as children and we know though that we have a Father who longs to forgive and cleanse us, a Father who says in *1 John 1:9: If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* So being a child of the King doesn't mean that you are without sin. It means that when we sin, we recognize we have someone in heaven speaking on our behalf, we have an advocate with the Father. *1 John 2:1 says: My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father -- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.* You see it's because we have Jesus' righteousness and not our own, that's what gives us the ability to freely participate in his table. So if you love your Lord, don't deny yourself the privilege that Jesus purchased for you on the cross. Again, he lived the life that we were supposed to live and then he died the death we all deserved to die in our place so that we could be made worthy of heaven, so that we too could receive a gift we can't even begin to comprehend. So as we take the bread and break the bread, take a moment to contemplate the beauty and the love of the Lord Jesus Christ.

*1 Corinthians 11:23 says: For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." So take, and eat. Take whatever time you need to thank God for the precious gift of his flesh as we participate in the bread. We're going to take the bread now and the cup later. And again, I just thank you, Lord, for the gift of your flesh.*

Well, I said before talking about miracles that they were dangerous and I said they're dangerous because they provoke a binary response. If your heart is predisposed and miraculously softened, it will be all you'll need to usher you into the kingdom. But listen to what Jesus said about how many are in that state. This is *Matthew 7:13*. He says: *"Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few."* And Jesus said that because the vast majority is predisposed to bitterly reject the kingdom. It was Jesus who said, *"Many are called but few are chosen."* If your heart is hard and embittered, the miraculous can just as easily make it more so and the religious leaders proved just that.

So once again let me paint the scene for you. Jesus is still surrounded by huge crowds and the demons are still exiting people and they're shrieking that Jesus is Lord. Jesus's family on the other side is there claiming that he's lost his mind and his enemies are there looking for an opportunity. Matthew's gospel tells us that Jesus heals right then and there a blind and deaf man who was demon-possessed. And now the religious leaders want to weigh in on the situation, giving the people their assessment of Jesus' power over demons. This is *Mark 3:22*. It says: *And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "by the prince of demons he casts out the demons."* Note this scripture well. This may be the most outrageous statement made in the entire Bible and there's a reason why the religious leaders responded the way they did. There's a spiritual principle that Jesus spoke of that says the more truth you reject, the less capable you become of accepting any other truth. The religious leaders are living proof of that principle. Jesus' response to the Pharisees was far reaching and it was terrifying. They had reached the point of no return. We pick up on verse 23: *And he called them to him and said to them in parables -- very important-- in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself*



*and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end. But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house."*

You see from this point forward Jesus changed his preaching. From this point forward he begins preaching in parables. That is in stories designed to be open and understandable if you are one of his sheep and closed and mystifying to people like the scribes and the Pharisees. Now at first even his disciples were bewildered. And later on when Jesus begins speaking in parables they were just completely blown away. They didn't know what to do. I mean there's an instance described in the gospel of Matthew where Jesus is approaching a crowd and by this time the crowds are so gigantic that crowd control demands that Jesus now preach from a boat. So he's preaching from a boat in the water so that the crowd can't advance to him. The disciples have arranged this, this huge crowd has gathered, Jesus is coming down to speak and he begins to speak to them and he gives them a five-minute lecture on gardening and then he leaves. He goes out and he says, a farmer went out to sow some seed and some landed on the side, some landed on rocky soil, some landed on thorny soil, some landed on good soil, the good soil produced a harvest thirty or so times what was sown and then he says, *"Let him who has ears to hear, hear,"* and he leaves. Nobody has a clue what he's talking about. And you can tell the disciples

are completely bewildered. They're befuddled. They begin to approach him and they say, this is *Matthew 13*, it says: *Why do you speak to them in parables?" He answered and said to them, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him."* Jesus is saying our ability to perceive the truth is like a camera aperture and that every time we reject the truth, the aperture clicks ever so slightly inward limiting the amount of light that we can take in. Well, eventually you may reach the point where it makes no difference how great the light is, how obvious the truth is, you simply can no longer perceive it. Jesus continues in verse 13, he says: *"Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. And in them the prophesy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says:*

*'HEARING YOU WILL HEAR AND SHALL NOT UNDERSTAND, AND SEEING YOU WILL SEE AND NOT PERCEIVE; FOR THE HEARTS OF THIS PEOPLE HAVE GROWN DULL, THEIR EARS ARE HARD OF HEARING, AND THEIR EYES THEY HAVE CLOSED, LEST THEY SHOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES AND HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, LEST THEY SHOULD UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEARTS AND TURN, SO THAT I SHOULD HEAL THEM.'*" These religious leaders knew all about the paralytic who had been dropped down through the rooftop and left perfectly restored carrying his bed. They certainly knew all

about the man with the shriveled hand that was healed on the Sabbath. And now they see a blind, deaf demon-possessed man fully restored and their response is exactly what you'd expect. They've rejected truth over and over again so their ability to perceive truth has become repeatedly diminished to the point where it doesn't matter how profound the truth is. It will never change their hearts of stone. I mean as Jesus puts it, *"Seeing they no longer see, and hearing they no longer hear."* Their ability to perceive truth itself has disappeared.

The ultimate expression of the stony heart occurred when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. I mean not only was Lazarus dead and in the tomb, he was clearly rotting, and everybody knew that. When Jesus instructs the men to roll back the stone, Lazarus' sister says, no, no, stop, no. She's objecting. She says: *"Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days."* Lazarus is in the advanced stages of decay. And yet when Jesus calls him, he comes out of the grave and he stands there fully restored. Well the Pharisees, they've got to mobilize. And the response of the Pharisees to this incredible miracle is predictable. *John 11:53: So from that day on they made plans to put him to death.* I mean just think about this for a second. I mean you've just seen a man who you know, these were people -- these were not strangers, they knew who Lazarus was and they knew

he was in the latter stages of decay and at Jesus' command he walks out of the tomb, takes off his wrappings and declares that he's alive and your reaction is, well, this Jesus has got to die. I mean in light of the spectacular miracle that Jesus has just performed, this is a position only a heart of stone could arrive at. In fact it turns out that Jesus' miracle with Lazarus was the final straw that eventuated in Jesus' crucifixion.

Jesus came to earth to establish his kingdom as its rightful king and perfect mediator and after three years of public ministry the religious leaders of the nation once again irredeemably rejected him. And it wasn't an edict. It wasn't even a pronouncement. Instead it was a clearly articulated insult. *And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "by the prince of demons he casts out the demons."* These folks had committed what is called "the unpardonable sin." They had attributed to Satan what Christ had done. It was Jesus himself who said this is unforgivable. Verse 28: *"Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin" -- for they were saying, "He has an unclean spirit."*

Well, this raises a very important question, the question is: What

indeed is an unforgivable sin? You know, I once heard somebody arguing with somebody about against speaking in tongues and they said, you know, you have no control what you're saying when you speak in tongues and after all, how do you know it's not the devil speaking instead of the Holy Spirit in prayer, and the other person was absolutely horrified. They said you may have just committed the unforgivable sin. I was like what? You may have just attributed to Satan what Christ was doing in that person. Folks, I have to tell you that's not even close. That's not at all what Jesus was referring to. The unpardonable sin is not a word or a sentence or a statement made. It is a heart condition. Jesus said in *Luke 6*: *"The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks."* Well the Pharisees' statement that Jesus heals by Satan's power was an overflow of their hearts that had become blind and deaf to the truth no matter how obvious that truth was. I mean it's the Holy Spirit who convicts us of truth, and blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is the repeated hardened determination to refuse the Spirit each time he speaks. A blind, deaf, demon-filled man fully restored, that's the Holy Spirit shouting, and so was Lazarus. Well the Pharisees' response was a willful decision to go deaf.

Tim Keller points out what looks like an apparent contradiction in *Matthew 12*. Jesus says: *"Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven."* And Jesus appears to be saying every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven, but this one, not so much. He says shouldn't Jesus have said: Well, almost every sin and blasphemy is forgivable? Again Keller asks, why didn't Jesus put it that way? Well the answer is that Jesus is speaking from two different perspectives. He's speaking externally from God's perspective, and he's speaking internally from man's. And again, let me just explain speaking from God's perspective. What God is saying is I will forgive any sin brought to me with repentance. We just spoke about it. It's what we speak about each month at communion when we say: *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* What God is stating categorically is that there is virtually nothing that we can do that is unforgivable. I mean just consider what happened to God on the cross. I mean there are people who have stripped him and are spitting on him and mocking him and nailing God himself to a cross, and Jesus' response is what? *"Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."* I mean what could possibly be worse than that?

Now the second statement that Jesus makes, *"But the blasphemy*

*against the Spirit will not be forgiven,"* that's an internal statement from our perspective, from man's perspective, and it's never about a one-time utterance that forever destroys you. Instead it's an attitude that refuses repeatedly to respond to the Holy Spirit's conviction. Again let me give you an example. A while back I spoke about there was a group of Internet atheists who wanted to demonstrate how little they cared about the claims of Christianity, and they mounted what they call "The Blasphemy Challenge." Individuals were challenged to make a You Tube video in which they publicly blasphemed the Holy Spirit rendering them, so they thought, forever unforgivable. Some 830 people responded and they responded by making videos of themselves for the purpose of demonstrating how little they cared about the seriousness of that sin, how much they reveled in being -- quote -- "unforgivable." I mean these were atheists after all who didn't believe in God, they didn't believe in the Holy Spirit. They also didn't understand the unforgivable sin at all. See the fact is any one of those 830 people who wish to confess and repent could do so and by the blood of Christ they would have been instantly forgiven. What would render their blasphemy unforgivable is not the fact that they have said something in front of a camera for a You Tube video but an ongoing refusal to allow the Holy Spirit to convict them of that sin. That's when that sin becomes unforgivable. John's gospel tells us that it's the Holy Spirit's job to -- quote --

*"convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment."*

Well, speaking against God's spirit continuously renders any sin whatsoever unforgivable because it cuts off the conviction that leads us to seek forgiveness in the first place. And whether it's crucifying the Son of God, making blasphemous You Tube videos or stealing the paper clip, the results are exactly the same, you cannot be forgiven for a sin that you will not acknowledge or confess. So that sin, any sin for that matter, becomes unforgivable. What the Pharisees did was to take an extreme example of God's goodness and power -- the casting out of a demon -- and attribute it specifically to Satan. In essence they were telling God there is nothing that you can do including the miraculous to change our determination to reject you. And so from that moment forward Jesus began to speak in parables. And it just wasn't a teaching technique, it was a profound judgment from God. Again *Matthew 13:13: Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. And in them the prophesy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: 'HEARING YOU WILL HEAR AND SHALL NOT UNDERSTAND, AND SEEING YOU WILL SEE AND NOT PERCEIVE'.*"

You see folks love to wax poetic about the limitless grace of God, about the infinite depths of his mercy and grace, but there's a mistaken notion buried in that thinking. It's that God has no



limits in terms of his grace. Well the fact is God has told us that there are limits to his grace. He made it very clear when he said in *Romans 2:4*: *Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. He will render to each one according to his works.* You see in the old days preachers used to say, "Oh sinner, sinner, do not presume on the grace of God." Today we resent even being referred to as a sinner although every single believer, myself included, is a sinner saved by grace. So let me repeat that old warning, Oh sinner, do not presume on the grace of God. Don't shut down that camera's aperture. God has given us the ultimate gift in his Son. He left heaven itself and came to earth to live a life just like we live with one huge exception, he lived it perfectly. And then he offered his life up in exchange for our sin so that we could by faith claim his righteousness as our own and stand before a holy God. He did nothing but heal the sick, feed the hungry, and preach the good news that salvation is by faith in his sacrifice and for that, we crucified him. The good news though is that there is still time. *2 Corinthians 6* says this: *We appealed to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For he says, "In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped*

you." *Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.* If you are not right with God, now is the time. If you're not right with God do not participate in this communion service. If you are not right and God is speaking to you and the Holy Spirit is troubling your soul and your conscience and you need to speak to somebody, as Fred said at the very beginning, just go to the You Tube address, find our address, you can get in touch with me. I'd be happy to sit down and talk with you. Get this thing right right now. But if you are right, now is the time to participate in the cup.

*1 Corinthians 11:25 says: In the same manner he also took the cup after supper, saying, this cup is the new covenant in my blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."* So take, and drink.

This is the time that we finish up by saying what we call heart, hands and feet, where we are trying to put some flesh on the idea of what it means to remember Christ. And I just want to comment on what we spoke about last week. We talked about how we as a church are trying to put together this idea of providing meals for the staff over at Bon Secours Hospital, and we're in the middle of doing that and we're going to have somewhere between fifty or more meals that we're going to be able to provide, maybe even more, as

more money comes in we're trying to work that out, but we're asking you all to send cards and scripture and emails and different ways that you as a church member recognize how important it is to support this. This disease is absolutely devastating. I read -- you know, this really brings it home to me. I read yesterday about a man named Paul Cary who was a retired firefighter and paramedic in Aurora, Colorado who just felt compelled, he felt compelled to come here. He came all the way across the country from Colorado to work as a paramedic in New York City. They said he got sick with COVID on April 19th and he died on Friday. And I just thought of that scripture it says in *John 15*, Jesus says "*Greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends*" and he was I thought, this is a guy from the other side of the country who came all the way over here and laid down his life for us. So we're just trying to support in a small way what these folks are trying to do for us here. We've get to shelter in place, we get to shelter at home. We've got guys coming from across the country dying in order to help us. And so I'm just asking this part of what we're asking you to do is to send us cards, send us your appreciation that we can pass on to these folks at the hospital and pray for them. Pray for every single one of the first responders who are literally representing what Jesus is talking about here. Pray for their families and let's show them our appreciation.

*Let's pray.*

*Father, I thank you for your grace and your goodness. I just pray for the family of Paul Cary. I want to remember him. Again I just think this is just a person who laid down his life for us. I just want to pray that we as a church could respond in a way that is meaningful, that can show how much we appreciate what these folks are doing for us. I pray for your grace, I pray for your wisdom, I pray for the ultimate gift that any one of these people would come to know you as Lord and Savior. If they don't, I pray that you would use us in that task in that way, that we might be one part of the link that brings them into your kingdom. And Lord, I pray that you would give us each and every one of us not just an appreciation for these folks but a determination to do whatever we can to show them the love of Christ. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*