

Pastor Dwight Wagner
Garden Heights Baptist Church
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“Can All Sin Be Forgiven?” **Mark 3:22-30**

Introduction

What's the most beautiful word in all the English language? What's the ugliest world in all the English language?

My initial answers would be as follows: Forgiveness is the most beautiful--the sweetest--word in the English language. The ugliest one would be sin! Therefore, the the most stunning promise a person can hear is this: “all your sins will be forgiven!” And the most scary, sobering or frightening sentence would be “You will never have forgiveness but are guilty of an eternal sin.”

But actually there is something even better than forgiveness! What could that be? I'll reveal the answer to this question near the end of the message this morning. Now, the answers that I give are not really just my opinion. They are God's truth. So without further comment, let's consider God's truth right from the words of Jesus as recorded in Mark 3:22-30.

“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.” And he called them to him and said to them 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. “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.”” (Mark 3:22–30)

A stunning promise

With the help of the Holy Spirit this day, I want to highlight three incredibly life-changing truths that God wants us to know. We will begin with a stunning promise!

Last week I introduced this text. I will review the highlights briefly. Jesus has been drawing large crowds wherever he goes. He is northern Israel in a region called Galilee, in a city called Capernaum, which serves as his ministry headquarters we would say, for much of his three year ministry, although he has

and will minister as well in Jerusalem (about 100 miles away). He has been teaching people about His kingdom. He has been calling all people to repent of their sin. He has also been healing masses of people from serious, sometimes life-long diseases. And he has been casting out demons—real-live exorcisms.

Now the big religious “brass” known as the “scribes” had just come into town to do a little investigation. They find Jesus in a house full of people and they watch him cast out a demon from a man who was both blind and unable to speak. They can't refute this supernatural miracle but instead of believing that Jesus is the Son of God they begin to spread a lie that he really is doing something supernatural—but his power comes from Satan, not God. “He is possessed by Beelzebul—another name for Satan who is also known as the “prince of demons.”

I love what Jesus does next. “He calls them over.” That is, “Come over here, guys.” We see Jesus doing this several times in Mark's story and whenever he does he is about say something really serious and important. For the first time in Mark's gospel, he speaks to them in “parables”—which is simply a concrete illustration that is laid aside truth to explain it more. In this case Jesus uses a few proverbial sayings to show the absurdity of the charge that he is operating with Satan's power when he exorcizes demons. He says, “How can Satan cast out Satan?” And he uses the illustration of a kingdom or a family fighting against themselves. If Satan does that, he's powerless.

Then, still refuting this lie about the source of his power in performing miracles, he gives an illustration about how a robber steals from someone else. First, he has to subdue the people in the house [a strong man] and then he will plunder the house.

The truth Jesus teaches is simple: Satan is this strong man. And his house includes sin, sickness, death, and demon possession. Demons serve in this house. And their plunder are people who are enslaved by evil, sometimes by demons themselves. At Jesus' temptation, after his baptism and before he enters full-time preaching, and now through His exorcism, Jesus is clearly proving that He is the Stronger One, empowered by the Holy Spirit. His mission is to overthrow, to bind, not to cooperate with Satan. The overthrow of Satan was accomplished when Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead, ascending back to heaven. Currently Satan still is seeking to kill, steal, and destroy. His final and irrevocable judgment is sure but it is still to come at the end of the age.

Now we are ready for the stunning promise. Verse 28, “Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man and whatever blasphemies they commit.” “Amen lego umin!” Truly I am saying to you! Those words appear 13 times in Mark and 62 times in all the gospels and they precede a very serious announcement! Only Jesus ever says, “Truly I say to you!”

“All sins will be forgiven men, even whatever malicious, injurious, disgraceful language they use against God or man—the word means slander!”

Does this mean that all the sins of everyone who has ever or who will ever live are forgiven—automatically? Is this teaching that there is universal forgiveness—that at the end of life God wipes away all sin—no questions asked? Our conscience, our sense of justice, screams “no.” That doesn't seem just. And the truth is Christ says the same thing. The Bible is clear that not all sin is forgiven. Clearly what Jesus is teaching is “All sin of which men repent of and seek God's forgiveness is forgiven.” The testimony of Scripture bears this out:

“Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. ” (Psalm 32:1)

“I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,” and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.” (Psalm 32:5)

“Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy. ” (Proverbs 28:13)

“From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”” (Matthew 4:17)

“and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” ” (Mark 1:15)

“I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.” ” (Luke 5:32)

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ” (1 John 1:9)

Don't miss, oh don't miss this wonderful truth! Jesus never turns down anyone who ask for forgiveness from an unrepentant heart. Do you see the wideness and the magnificence of God's mercy? Every sin, yes every kind of sin, even blasphemy against God, will be forgiven, if one turns from his or her sin and trusts Jesus who died for our sin that we might have peace with God.

You may ask, “Why do I need this?” or “Who is God?” or “What if I don't? Then what? Well, here's the big story of the Bible. As we heard last week it is a story of hope. The story begins in a beautiful Garden that was designed and created by God Himself, who made created everything in the heavens and on the earth. He created man literally from the dust of the ground and then made the first woman from the side of man. He brought them together and told them how they could enjoy this everlasting happiness in a perfect world. But not very long after this, man chose to believe the horrifying lies of Satan who himself was created by God but had already rebelled against God and lead other angels to do the same thing. Sin entered the world and with it death. Death in the physical sense. Death in the spiritual sense of an alienation now between man and God. And finally eternal death—for all who die in that state of spiritual alienation—who are never

reconciled to God before death will be eternally separated from the loving, forgiving presence of God forever. The hope, however, is rooted in the truth that, despite man's sin and willful dismissal of God's law, God is still willing to establish peace and to forgive sin. But justice demands the penalty of the law-breaking rebels be paid. So God initiated, designed, and completed a plan by which rebellious sinners can be restored to Him. So He sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, to be the Sin-bearer for all who would ever believe in Him. Jesus took upon Himself the penalty for sinner in order that God would be just and the justifier, the forgiver of all who would repent of their sin and believe in Jesus alone. God established this one and only way to be reconciled to Him. Jesus Christ is coming again one day and He will restore all creation to its original state. When He comes, there will be final judgment for all who die rejecting Him and He will reward all who have believed in Him.

Now Jesus spent 30+ years on the earth living a perfectly righteous life and providing compelling evidence that He is indeed truly the Son of God. By the time he spoke these words, the evidence was mounting. It was powerful, sufficient, clear and authoritative. Jesus calls each person to respond to who He is and what He has done by dying on the cross. God doesn't ask any person to do anything—to perform any ritual and do a series of good deeds—in order to deserve or somehow earn this forgiveness of sin. He freely gives it by grace. Beside if you could earn it, how many good works would you have to do in order to pay for rebelling against a perfect God repeatedly every day of your life? God simply summons you to repent and to believe! He commands us to turn from loving our sin to loving Him and trusting Him as our only hope of everlasting life.

What will you do with this knowledge today? How will you respond?

A sobering warning

But wait, you say. Are you sure that God forgives every sin. Look at verse 29. It seems that God will not forgive one sin? *“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.”* (Mark 3:29–30).

This warning is sober, serious, deadly, eternally serious! It is often called the unpardonable sin.

But, before we talk about this sin, let's just pause for a minute and talk about sin. What is sin? Do you believe there is such a thing as sin? We don't talk about sin very much in our culture, you know. What makes sin sin? We will talk about this more as we go along but sin is no less than breaking a commandment of God. He has given us many in his Word but they are summarized well in the Ten Commandments. Have you always valued God more than anything else in your life? Have you loved God with all your heart, strength, soul and mind? Have you

ever used profanity or God's name irreverently? Have you ever looked upon someone who was not your husband or life with lustful thoughts? Have you ever lied? Have you ever really wanted something that you didn't have? All of that is sin. Every person who has ever lived, except one, has sinned. And worse than that, everyone except one person has had a sin nature.

Now, what is the unpardonable sin? Is it possible to commit it today? Who is liable to commit the unpardonable sin? What makes unpardonable?

First of all, notice that whatever it is, it is the context of them saying that Jesus "has an unclean spirit" (v.30.) So the unpardonable sin isn't simply cursing or cursing the Holy Spirit. It's not taking the name of the Lord in vain. Over the years people have suggested that it might be adultery or some other sexual perversion, murder, genocide or even suicide. But none of those square with the context of this passage. And they also don't measure up with other Scripture.

For example, if blasphemy or swearing or some other way of slandering God were the unpardonable sin, then Peter certainly would never have been forgiven. He was guilty of a triple, profanity-laced denial of Jesus and yet was restored by Christ Himself (Mark 14:71; John 21:15-17). There was forgiveness for David who murdered an innocent man, lied, stole, and committed adultery (see Psalm 51). Christ forgave the woman of ill-repute in Luke 7. The prodigal son was forgiven for his wicked lifestyle (Luke 15). And consider Paul's testimony:

"I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. " (1 Timothy 1:12–17)

Also, from the context itself I don't believe that the unpardonable sin is simply a single act, but is rather a habitual heart attitude Verse 30 shows this: "And they were saying."

So what is the sin that can't be forgiven but rather is an eternal sin? It is the ongoing, continual rejection of the witness of the Holy Spirit to the deity and to the work of Jesus Christ. It is a perversion in the heart that calls good evil and evil good. It is an ongoing, continual and ultimate rejection of the Holy Spirit's testimony which is displayed in the miracles and signs Jesus performed as well as in our conscience and through the knowledge of the Word of God.

So to commit this sin, one has to refuse to acknowledge and be defiantly hostile toward the truth that God is working and has worked in Jesus Christ who was empowered by the Spirit and whom the Spirit bears witness that He is God.

It is a sin then that requires a knowledge of who Jesus says He is, a knowledge of the substantial evidence which He presented while on this earth as to His person and work and then an utter rejection of these truth. Who was committing this sin? It was the accredited, certified theological teachers of God's people—the scribes. Their daily responsibility was to study and teach the Scriptures which were the witness of the Spirit. So the ones who need to be most concerned I think about committing this sin are those who are well schooled in the Scriptures—even the approved teachers and official leaders in churches—the vast majority of which today reject the witness of the Spirit as to the deity of Jesus Christ. And I would hasten to add, it is a warning to those who have grown up in the church and may even have a pretty solid foundation in theology and yet willfully now reject Christ in their hearts!

That's what these scribes were doing or would ultimately did. Jesus is warning them. They studied all the evidence, they sifted through all the teaching, they saw the miracles and his power over demons and after it was all in they concluded that Jesus was doing it all by Satan, not by the Spirit.

You see, when Jesus came, He was sent by the Father and He was empowered by the Spirit of God. He was very clear about. He didn't come to do His will. He came to do His Father's will. And He did everything He did by the power of the Spirit. The Spirit came upon Him at His baptism after which the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness to triumph over Satan's temptations and then the Holy Spirit anointed Him to preach and work His miracles. And these men rejected all that! They had full exposure to the truth, to the gospel, to the revelation of God and their final answer was: It's not true! We reject Christ! He's a fraud!

Can people do that today? Sure they can. Not in the exact same way. I understand that but people can hear the gospel, study the Scriptures in-depth, be fully aware of Jesus' claims, works, and miracles and reject it all! I have known people who have done that.

That's why there are warning passages all throughout the book of Hebrews, for example. Those are real warnings—severe warnings to people who had a full awareness of Jesus and what the apostolic teaching was—and the author was saying, “Don't reject it! If you do, that will have eternal consequences.”

“how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.” (Hebrews 2:3–4)

“Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits. For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, ” (Hebrews 6:1–5)

“For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ” (Hebrews 10:26)

“How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has spurned the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? ” (Hebrews 10:29)

Do you understand this? All that is left for you—if you have a full knowledge of Jesus Christ and reject Him—is fearful, terrifying, severe judgment. The hottest corners in hell are reserved for those who have a full knowledge of the gospel and reject it. So if you are here today and reject Christ, you are in danger of this sin. Your knowledge is greater after hearing this message. So if you understand the gospel and conclude it isn't true—that Jesus isn't who He said He is—then you ought to be frightened.

Now again, let me remind you this is not an isolated act sometime in one's life where you hear the gospel and reject it. No, because if that were true everyone of us would have committed this sin, right? Most people don't hear the gospel one time and confess Christ as Lord. I know of people who have rejected the gospel for 50 years or longer but then one day, the Holy Spirit draws them to Christ and they believe. I doubt there are many here today who heard the gospel the first time and believed. So, that's not it.

And furthermore, we don't really know—we aren't God—when someone has fully crossed that line. So, we never stop giving them the good news that they can be reconciled to God by the blood of Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, if you are genuinely concerned and anxious over whether or not you have committed the unpardonable sin, it is likely that you have not. J. C. Ryle famously said, “There is such a thing as a sin which is never forgiven. But those who are troubled about it are most unlikely to have committed it.” On the other hand, those who actually commit this sin are so dominated by evil they aren't even concerned about this possibility of facing the judgment of this eternal sin.

I'm not saying, one should never think about this eternal, unforgivable sin, but the one solution to know you haven't committed it is to trust Christ! Repent of your sin and believe the gospel! That's the way to insure you don't grieve the Holy Spirit and then resist the Holy Spirit and quench the Spirit's convicting work in your life.

On the authority of the Word of God, I can tell you today what you should do with this warning! It is found in both Psalm 95:7-8 and Hebrews 3:7-8, *“Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.” (Hebrews 3:7–8).* Today is the day of salvation! Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ that you may be saved. It is the will of God that none should perish but that all should come to repentance.

A sure hope

We've seen a stunning promise and a sobering warning. Lastly, let's focus on a sure hope. As we saw last week in verses 31-35, this story ends with his family coming to sort of “arrest and kidnap” him because they think he is insane. People tell Jesus that his family has arrived and are waiting for him. Jesus surrounded and actually squished by the crowd inside the house, takes a look at them and gestures with his hands, “Here's [my family]—my mother and brothers. For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.”

The sure hope is that if you confess your sin and forsake it in order to follow Jesus and believe in His righteous life and death, you will be saved. You will be forgiven and even better than that—you will be in His family. That is, you are not just forgiven of your sin and then left out to dry the rest of your life on your own. No, God adopts you into His family. He not only credits your sin to Jesus Christ on the cross, but He credits or imputes Christ's perfect righteousness to you. So that as many as received Christ, to them God gives the power or authority become the sons of God even to them who believe on His name.

“Whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother!” What's the will of God! God *“desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”* (1 Timothy 2:4). And if you do, Jesus is not ashamed to call you His brother! Amazing grace! As John writes,

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.” (John 3:16–19).

Now, I close then with this truth! Anyone who is truly repentant and comes to God in the name of Jesus and asks for forgiveness of sin will receive it. There is no reason to despair.

“as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.”
(Psalm 103:12)

““Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they

shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.
" (Isaiah 1:18)

"I have blotted out your transgressions like a cloud and your sins like mist; return to me, for I have redeemed you." (Isaiah 44:22)

"Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." (Isaiah 55:6–7)

"Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love. He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. You will show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham, as you have sworn to our fathers from the days of old." (Micah 7:18–20)

Can all your sins be forgiven? Yes, they can. You have a choice of two ways to live. One way is to reject your Creator and Ruler: God. You can choose to keep running your own life your way. If you do, realize you are already condemned God and you will face certain judgment and death.

Or you can live God's way. This way calls you to submit to God and His Son as your ruler. You rely, that is trust in, Jesus' death and resurrection which results in being forgiven by God and being granted eternal life. "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, but God's wrath remains on him." (John 3:36). Believe Christ's death and resurrection as payment for your sin and God completely forgives you. He pours out His Spirit on your life. You won't be God's rebel any longer but be a part of Jesus' family.

If you recognize today that you are a sinner in rebellion against God, what should you do next? First, talk to God in prayer and confess to Him that you are one who deserves His punishment but that you are asking Him for mercy based on the death of His Son in your place, Secondly, start doing what Jesus said here. Start doing the will of God by placing yourself under His authority. This will be the new direction for the rest of your life. Start living as if God is now your ruler. And then keep trusting Christ. Will you fail and sin again? Absolutely, but keep looking back to the Christ's death as your only hope of forgiveness and eternal life.

Not ready to come to Christ yet? I urge to investigate further what has been said to. If what Jesus says is true, your decision is a matter of eternal life or death. Read this gospel of Mark in its entirety and ask who did Jesus say He was and what did He do. You will find that He is willing to forgive you if you come to him!