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The Gospel According to Matthew

The Unpardonable Sin – Part 3

January 27, 2019

Sermon Text: Matthew 12:43-50

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 3:7-19

Mat 12:43-50 "When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, but finds none. (44) Then it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when it comes, it finds the house empty, swept, and put in order. (45) Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there, and the last state of that person is worse than the first. So also will it be with this evil generation."

(46) While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his

brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him. (48) But he replied to the man who told him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" (49) And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! (50) For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

Halfway Salvation

This morning's text actually still concerns this sobering matter of the unpardonable sin which we have considered twice already. In the first study we looked specifically at Jesus' warning to the Pharisees who had just witnessed Him delivering a demon-possessed man and yet attributed Jesus' power to Satan:

Mat 12:25-32 Knowing their thoughts, he said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. (26) And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? (27)

And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. (28) But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. (29) Or how can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house. (30) Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. (31) Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. (32) And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

We related this unpardonable sin to the Apostle's words in Hebrews 6 and also John's statements about the sin for which we are not required to pray – that of the apostate.

And then we learned that the starting point for anyone who would be put right with God is not to demand more evidence from God, but rather to believe the revelation God has already given us:

Mat 12:38-39 Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from

you." (39) But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.

We said:

THIS is the unpardonable sin. Who commits it? Religious people. People in the Lord's visible church. People who hear God's truth, people who know His Word is true, and yet they choose to walk in their evil ways. No matter what mighty works the Lord has done among them by His Spirit, they reject Him....

What kind of people commit the unforgiveable sin? People like you and people like me – IF we hear God's Word over and over, IF the Holy Spirit shows us that Word is true, IF we experience and even taste God's goodness to us in Jesus, and then we fall away and go back to the world, embracing some idol in place of Christ, holding Jesus up to contempt, then for such a person, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sin.

Now, it is in this context that Jesus continues to speak of the activity of the devil in enslaving people. *And He really is elaborating further on this subject of the unpardonable sin.* Specifically, how it is committed by people who are of this type:

Mat 13:20-22 As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, (21) yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. (22) As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.

What does Jesus mean? Listen as I read the text once more:

Mat 12:43-50 "When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, but finds none. (44) Then it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when it comes, it finds the house empty, swept, and put in order. (45) Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there, and the last state of that person is worse than the first. So also will it be with this evil generation."

First of all, the Lord is providing these enemies with further evidence of who He is. If, as they accused him of doing, He cast out the demon from the possessed man by the power of the devil and not of the Spirit, then obviously what is going to happen is

that the man will not remain healed and delivered. The power of Satan over him has not been broken and in fact the supposed "exorcism" was only a ploy by the devil to make people think the demon was gone. But the man will end up being re-possessed and will be in a worse condition than before.

That did not happen. The Pharisees could look at the man who the Lord delivered anytime they wanted. He remained free and healed.

We should also note that Jesus' words to the Pharisees here indicate that demonic possession is real, and that in fact Jesus assumed that the Pharisees knew it was real. There can be no doubt that in our day Satan and his minions are possessing people. How else can we explain the horrific things that seem to fill the news more and more everyday?

And notice what Jesus says about a disembodied spirit - "*it passes through waterless places seeking rest.*" We must not be the kind of person who mishandles Scripture by pressing explanations into every single word as here - "waterless places." This is the very kind of phrase that some lunatic using religion for his own self glory will grab hold of and create an elaborate doctrine from. Jesus' point here may simply be this: *demons*

always work to find a “home” to own. That is to say, the devil’s desire is to enslave and possess people, and for him and his hordes to be ejected from a human being is the greatest torment, like being in a waterless desert. You see this here:

Mat 8:29-31 And behold, they cried out, "What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?" (30) Now a herd of many pigs was feeding at some distance from them. (31) And the demons begged him, saying, "If you cast us out, send us away into the herd of pigs."

Satan then is always on the prowl, as Peter tells us, looking for someone to devour – like a roaring lion.

And this brings us then to the major point of this passage – listen to William Hendriksen explain:

“To be delivered from a demon is a blessing. That type of condition, as has been indicated, might well describe Israel during the days of the Baptist’s active ministry and shortly thereafter. But in and by itself this does not suffice.

To become scared of going to hell, scared perhaps even to the point of confessing one’s sins and accepting baptism, is not enough. It would only

leave the soul *empty*: ‘unoccupied, swept clean, put in order.’ Such a condition cannot meet the deepest needs of the human heart. Harmlessness is not the same as holiness. Desisting from wrong differs by a whole heaven from being a blessing.

What Jesus demands is the entire devotion of the heart, so that it will render spontaneous thanksgiving to God and for his sake will be a blessing to the neighbor. Nothing less than that is required. A fig tree that produces nothing but leaves is cursed even though it yields no rotten fruit.” [New Testament Commentary: The Gospel of Matthew, Baker].

Here is a perfect example of exactly what Jesus means when he refers to a person who, by self-made religion and for their own self-glory, “sweeps clean” his life from outward sin but who has not truly been regenerated and thus the Holy Spirit (the only one who can “bind the strong man”) is not present in him. This is the autobiographical account of John Bunyan in his book *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* where he is describing how he was often struck with fear of judgment for his wickedness.

Now therefore I went on in sin with great greediness of mind, still grudging

that I could not be so satisfied with it, as I would. This did continue with me about a month, or more; but one day, as I was standing at a neighbour's shop window, and there cursing and swearing, and playing the madman, after my wonted manner, there sat within, the woman of the house, and heard me; who, though she also was a very loose and ungodly wretch, yet protested that I swore and cursed at that most fearful rate, that she was made to tremble to hear me; and told me further, *that I was the ungodliest fellow for swearing, that she ever heard in all her life; and that I, by thus doing, was able to spoil all the youth in the whole town, if they come but in my company.*

27. At this reproof I was silenced, and put to secret shame; and that too, as I thought, before the God of heaven; wherefore, while I stood there, and hanging down my head, I wished with all my heart that I might be a little child again, that my father might learn me to speak without this wicked way of swearing; for, thought I, I am so accustomed to it, that it is in vain for me to think of a reformation; for I thought it could never be.

28. But how it came to pass, I know not; I did from this time forward, so leave my swearing, that it was a great wonder to myself to observe it; and whereas before I knew not how to speak unless I put an oath before, and

another behind, to make my words have authority; now I could, without it, speak better, and with more pleasantness than ever I could before. All this while I knew not Jesus Christ, neither did I leave my sports and plays.

29. But quickly after this, I fell into company with one poor man that made profession of religion; who, as I then thought, did talk pleasantly of the scriptures, and of the matters of religion; wherefore falling into some love and liking to what he said, I betook me to my Bible, and began to take great pleasure in reading, but especially with the historical part thereof; for as for Paul's Epistles, and such like scriptures, I could not away with them, being as yet ignorant, either of the corruptions of my nature, or of the want and worth of Jesus Christ to save me.

30. Wherefore I fell to some outward reformation both in my words and life, and did set the commandments before me for my way to heaven; which commandments I also did strive to keep, and, as I thought, did keep them pretty well sometimes, and then I should have comfort; yet now and then should break one, and so afflict my conscience; but then I should repent, and say, I was sorry for it, and promise God to do better next time, and there get help again; for then I thought I pleased God as well as any man in *England*.

31. Thus I continued about a year; all which time our neighbours did take me to be a very godly man, a new and religious man, and did marvel much to see such a great and famous alteration in my life and manners; and indeed so it was, though yet I knew not Christ, nor grace, nor faith, nor hope; for, as I have well seen since, had I then died, my state had been most fearful.

32. But, I say, my neighbours were amazed at this my great conversion, from prodigious profaneness, to something like a moral life; and truly, so they well might; for this my conversion was as great, as for Tom of Bethlehem to become a sober man. Now therefore they began to praise, to commend, and to speak well of me, both to my face, and behind my back.

Now I was, as they said, become godly; now I was become a right honest man. But oh! when I understood these were their words and opinions of me, it pleased me mighty well. For, though as yet I was nothing but a poor painted hypocrite, yet, I loved to be talked of as one that was truly godly. I was proud of my godliness, and indeed, I did all I did, either to be seen of, or to be well spoken of, by men: and thus I continued for about a twelvemonth, or more.

the strong man” and redeem us from slavery to sin and the devil. And so we must take careful note:

It is a dangerous and perilous and wicked endeavor to toy with the gospel. To sweep up one's life through some type of self-reformation, yet continue to reject Christ. To do so is to simply give Satan a more comfortable dwelling place and to become enslaved to him 7-fold times more than before.

“Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there, and the last state of that person is worse than the first.”

I have known such people over the years. I have seen and known very well young men who claimed to have been called to preach the gospel and even become ministers. They completed seminary. And yet, over the years, the façade came crashing down so that today you would not even recognize them as the same person who was so apparently zealous for the Lord. Their last state is worse than they were in before they ever heard of Christ. Because they never were born again. It was all an outward sham. And they knew it was.

Christ is the only One who can set us free. He is the only One who can “bind

Not only *can* Christ set us free, He is *willing* to set us free from sin and

slavery to the devil and from fear, and furthermore *He is the only one who can bind the strong man.* No other way. The only question remaining is the one we looked at last time – *do you want to be saved?*

Jesus' Mother and Brothers

Finally then, listen to these closing verses of Matthew 12 and we will just state the main point:

Mat 12:46-50 While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him. (48) But he replied to the man who told him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" (49) And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! (50) For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

There are no favorites in the kingdom of God. This is good news to us, is it not? If, in contrast to these hypocrites, you truly desire to do the will of the Father, He will be your father and Christ will love you as His own brother and sister and mother.

There is also a very, very important truth here that so many people miss and it causes them to turn away from Christ. Hendriksen states it well-

Spiritual ties are more important than ties of blood."

We must never permit even father, mother, sister, or brothers to prevent us from following Christ. Christ and His people are our real family and if they are not then we do not belong to Him.

Finally, Christian, consider this as we end. Here is the Lord Jesus and all the sea of humanity is before Him. His eye lights upon you and with the genuine love of God He announces in the hearing of everyone – *this is my brother.* And He knows you by name. That is what is going to happen on the Day when He comes. Be sure this is true of you. Don't be a whitewashed Pharisee, all swept and apparently clean by your own doings but in the end a greater child of the devil than you were.