

*The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 26 May 2024. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.*

## **The Unpardonable Sin**

### **Matthew 12:22-32**

Some years ago, an Iranian young woman named **Afrooz** was seeking for peace in her heart. She was deeply troubled, and was looking for something—anything—to take away her inward pain. She turned to the religion in which she had been brought up; but she found no comfort there. She was already filled with nagging doubts about her religion; and at this crisis point in her life, her religion wasn't giving her any answers. In frustration, she even considered becoming a poet. (Poets, in the Persian culture, are highly respected, and well-paid.) She was thinking about abandoning herself to a life of materialism and sinful pleasure; but she knew that this wasn't the answer, either. Finally, she prayed to the god that she had been taught about all her life, and said, "If you are going to help me... tonight you should show yourself to me. If you don't show me a sign tonight, I will turn to this material life, and be a sinner."<sup>1</sup>

Well, Afrooz did receive an answer to her prayer that very night—but *not* from the god that she had expected. At about midnight, she had a dream; and in this dream, she opened her eyes to find that her room was filled with dazzling light. She looked up, and saw a Man wearing a white, shining robe; and even though she had never seen any kind of picture or painting of Jesus in her life, she somehow knew that this was Jesus the Messiah, and no one else. She picked up a pen and paper to write, in case He should give her some big, important message: but He simply told her, "Come unto me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."<sup>2</sup> That was it. The vision ended, and she woke up.

Well, this actually made Afrooz angry! For one thing, she had prayed to *her* god, but instead had gotten an answer from the God of the *Christians*. Where was *her* god? Also, she didn't have any "context" to help her understand what Jesus had said. She rolled up her prayer mat and angrily said, "I am done with this! I am going to sleep!" However, the next night, Jesus appeared in a dream to her for a second time; and this time He said, "Didn't I tell you to come under my shadow, and come with me, and be safe?"<sup>3</sup>

Afrooz was very bewildered now; and it was beginning to show. At work one day, one of her co-workers asked her what was wrong; but, of course, she knew that she didn't dare mention that she had been thinking about Isa (Jesus). She told her co-worker she was out of sorts because she hadn't seen her mother for a while; however, he knew that she wasn't telling the truth. Discreetly and quietly, he told her that he was a Christian; and he said, "God is love. Bring your complaints to him." Afrooz was shocked that this man actually had the courage, in a public place, to declare himself a Christian; but she was in for an even bigger shock. He carefully slipped a Bible (which she had never seen before in her life) out of his pocket. He then opened it up to **Matthew 11:28**, and asked her to read a verse; and the verse said, "***Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.***"<sup>4</sup>

*That* was when Afrooz decided to believe on Jesus, and surrender her life to Him; and from that day forward, her life was completely changed.<sup>5</sup> Now, her new life certainly was not *easy*. After becoming a Christian, Afrooz soon learned that there is no place in Iran for Bible-believing Christians. She married a fellow believer at the underground church that she had joined; but from the very night of their wedding and forward, they were constantly harassed by secret police, and were denied the most basic needs, such as housing, employment, and schooling for their son. Nearly everyone shuns them, and treats them like dirt. To this day, they are forced to wander about from place to place, like nomads. However, they have counted the cost, and consider Jesus to be worth it, because He has filled their hearts with peace and joy! However, Afrooz had to go through a *struggle* before she found that peace. At first, she rejected Jesus' call, and told Him that she was "done" with Him! Yet, despite her resistance to the pricking and prodding of the Spirit of God on her heart, she found Jesus to be a wonderful and forgiving Saviour.

My friends, there is only one sin that *cannot* be pardoned: and that is the sin of rejecting the conviction of the Holy Spirit, as He calls you to come to Jesus for salvation. That is what we will be talking about this morning. The title of this message is ***The Unpardonable Sin.***

**Read Matthew 12:22-32.**

### **I. The criticism by the Pharisees (vv. 22-30)**

In our last message, we saw that Jesus had withdrawn Himself from His old enemies, the Pharisees, because they were taking council together on how they might kill Him. Now, as I said last week, Jesus did not withdraw Himself from the Pharisees because He *feared* their murderous plots. Jesus could protect Himself from His enemies by any means He wished. (Jesus often walked away, right when His enemies were about to kill Him!) Why *did* Jesus retreat from the Pharisees, then? First of all, because it was not the right time, the right place, or the right way, for Him to die. Jesus had to die on a hill outside Jerusalem, on a cross, in A.D. 30, on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan, at 3:00 p.m., to fulfil all the prophecies concerning his sacrificial death on the cross for our sins. However, there was another reason why Jesus withdrew Himself from His enemies. Jesus also withdrew Himself because He would not force Himself on those who refused Him. When men continually reject Christ, the Spirit of God does not continually convict them, or strive with them. After a certain point, the Spirit withdraws from scorners and blasphemers, and deals instead with those who are meek enough to seek the Lord. Well, that's exactly what Jesus did on this occasion. Jesus *literally, physically* withdrew Himself; and many people came to Him to be healed of diseases and infirmities.

However, it wasn't long before the Pharisees showed up once again, and began to look for an opportunity to oppose Him. Now, it was at about this time that a demon-possessed man was brought to Jesus. This man was so badly tormented by the demon, that he couldn't see or speak. Yet, this was no problem for Jesus. With a simple word, Jesus cast out the demon, and immediately caused this man to see and speak! Yet, how did the people react when they saw the healing of this poor man? They all believed on Jesus as the King of Israel, right? Sadly, no. They had a *mixed* reaction, at best. They were all amazed; but they were not necessarily convinced that Jesus was the Messiah. They said, "***Is not this the son of David?***" To us, this might sound like an expression of *belief*; but it actually wasn't. In the Greek language, the word *meti* ("is not") is used to introduce a question in which the person expects a *negative* answer. Basically, they were saying, "This man *can't* be the Son of David—can He?" It was

as though they were *compelled*, by their own eyes, to believe that Jesus was their Messiah: yet, they still couldn't believe it. Folks, this shows the power of unbelief in the human heart! This shows how blinded sinners are both by their own sin, and by the god of this world, Satan!

As for the Pharisees, there was no mixture of belief and unbelief in *them*. These men's hearts were *very* hardened in unbelief. Let's look again at their reaction. **(Read Matthew 12:24 again.)** The Pharisees' contempt for Jesus can be seen, first of all, by the fact that they referred to Jesus simply as *houtos* ("this"). The word "fellow" is added in italics in our Bible, to make it read smoothly in English; but in the Greek, they simply said, "*This* doth not cast out devils, but by the prince of the devils." They didn't say "this *man*": rather, they spoke of Jesus as though He were a "thing"! However, that wasn't the worst part of their insult. The Pharisees actually had the *chutzpah* to accuse Jesus of casting out demons through the power of Beelzebub! "Beelzebub" was an ancient Philistine god, whose name literally means "the lord of the flies"; but the Jews applied this name to Satan. Think of that! These men had the audacity to tell the Saviour that He was in league with Satan!

Now, the Pharisees were not shy about publicly denouncing Jesus; but on this occasion, they didn't confront Jesus out loud. Instead, they spoke in low whispers to the people nearby them. However, Matthew says that Jesus "**knew their thoughts.**" He wasn't merely reading their body language, and *guessing* at what they might be saying; He knew exactly what they were saying, because He is God. Incidentally, this was *not* the first time that the Pharisees had made this accusation. Remember back in **Matthew 9**, when Jesus cast a devil out of a man? How did the Pharisees react *then*? They accused Jesus of casting out devils through Beelzebub, the prince of the devils. This accusation had been around for a while now. The Pharisees watched Jesus like a hawk; and whenever He did a miracle or cast out a demon, they were always there, trying to persuade people that He was in league with Satan.

How, then, did Jesus respond to them? As usual, Jesus responded to them by asking *them* some thought-provoking and convicting questions: and his first question to them was, "**Why would Satan cast out Satan?**" **(Read Matthew 12:25-26 again.)**

This is simple logic, isn't it? You don't need a PhD to understand this. Everyone can grasp what Jesus is saying here, because it is an obvious truth. Many people down through the centuries have quoted this Scripture, and have applied it to many different situations. For example, in 1858, an American senator named Abraham Lincoln, who was running for president of the United States at the time, said these famous words in a campaign speech: "**A house divided against itself cannot stand.** I believe this government cannot endure permanently half-slave, and half-free." Even though Lincoln was not, to my knowledge, a true Christian, he understood the simple truth that a divided house cannot stand; and therefore, the United States, which was half-free and half-slave, could not continue to stand *unless* the evil of slavery were removed. Well, so it is in Satan's kingdom. Why would Satan cast out demons, when they're all on the same side? Their kingdom would fall if they did!

Having established the fact that a divided house cannot stand, Jesus now asked another simple question. He said, "**And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out?**" Now, whose "children" was Jesus talking about? He was talking about the "sons" of the Pharisees—in other words, the *disciples* of the Pharisees. You see, there was no

shortage of exorcists in Jesus' day; and most of them were from the schools of the Pharisees. The Pharisees' disciples claimed to be able to cast out demons by invoking the name of the most High God; and it appeared that they were, sometimes, successful. Do you see, then, what Jesus is saying? He's saying, "You Pharisees claim that your disciples can cast out demons; and when they do, you claim that they did it by the power of God. Why, then, when *I* cast out a demon, do you accuse me of doing it through the power of Satan? Maybe we should go ask your disciples what *they* think about this, and let them be the judges!"

It doesn't appear that the Pharisees had any answer to this question! And how *could* they answer Him? Jesus had just exposed the foolishness of their reasoning! Yet, in Jesus' answer to the Pharisees, we do find a perplexing statement. Jesus said, "***By whom do your children cast them out?***" Jesus seems to be implying that the Pharisees' disciples actually *could* cast out demons. But was this true? How could the Pharisees' disciples have any power to cast out demons, if they were lost men? They themselves were blinded by Satan: how, then, could *they* cast out demons? To answer that question, let's start by reminding ourselves of who Satan is!

### **Read 2 Corinthians 4:3-6 and 11:13-15.**

My friends, Satan is a master deceiver. He is "***a liar, and the father of it.***" He and his wicked angels are masters of disguise. They are experts at making themselves (and their *human* servants) look like good guys. Satan's angels often appear to people whose minds are already groomed and open to the paranormal: and when they appear to these poor souls, they often claim to be one of God's angels, and then deliver false and damnable doctrines to them. By this means, Satan creates false religions, which conflict with *other* false religions that he has already created. Then, Satan's angels stir up the followers of these false religions against *each other*; and thus foment wars, and much loss of life. This is what Satan does, because "***he was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth.***"

So, what does this have to do with the matter of whether the Pharisees' followers could actually cast out demons? Plenty! Remember, Satan and his angels are deceivers; and one of the ways that Satan's demons deceive people is by creating the impression that they can cast out evil spirits through their false prophets. In every religion, there are people who claim to be "exorcists"—people who can cast out evil spirits from people, or from haunted houses, through their religious rituals; and sometimes, they do appear to have a measure of success. (Otherwise, why would people keep going to them for help?) But *do* they actually cast out demons? No. They only *appear* to do so. You see, there are many people in our world who are indwelt and manipulated by demons; yet, they appear to be perfectly sane, and in their right minds. (Demons don't *always* make people foam at the mouth, convulse, and act crazy.) How, then, do Satan and his angels set up a fake exorcisms? It's simple. The demons that are inside the person make it *appear* that they have left, by ceasing to make that person act crazy and abnormal! The demons act in concert to deceive people.

Folks, Satan and his demons are not divided. They are united in their hatred of God, of God's people, and of the human race. By the way, it's not that they *couldn't* be divided. Satan and his angels *are* evil beings; and thus, you may be sure they hate and envy each other. (There is no honour among thieves!) Nonetheless, their kingdom is *not* divided. Despite the fact that they are treacherous beings, there is something that binds Satan and his demons together in

unity—and that is their mutual hatred of God and man, and their fight for *survival!* They know, from experience, that the God who cast them out of Heaven 6,000 years ago is all-powerful, and all-knowing; and they also know that they were *defeated* at the cross.

**Read John 12:30-32.**

Satan and his demons know that their power over mankind was broken when Jesus was “lifted up” on the cross to die for our sins. They *know* that they are already defeated. They know that the Rapture of the Christians is coming, followed by the seven-year Tribulation period; and they know that when Christ returns to earth just *after* the Tribulation period, their power will be crushed, and they will bound for 1,000 years in the bottomless pit. This is why the demons inside the maniac of Gadara beseeched Jesus not to cast them into the abyss, and “torment” them “*before the time.*” The demons tremble in fear, because they know that their judgment is coming! Therefore, they work in unity to tell lies; to create false paths, and false religions; to stir up hatred; and to destroy as many lives as possible. They *know* that they won’t win in the end; yet, in their desperation, they continue to try to derail God’s plan for the ages. At the very least, they want to keep as many people as possible from believing on Jesus, so that those souls will spend eternity in the Lake of Fire, with *them.*

*Could* Satan make it *appear* that he can cast out demons? *You’d better believe* He can—and *does!* That is why virtually every religion in the world claims to perform exorcisms. Make no mistake about it, though: those who reject the Gospel of Jesus Christ are false prophets, despite whatever appearance of success they might have in “cleansing” haunted houses, or casting out spirits. The demons may calm down for a time; but they later resume the torment upon their victims with a vengeance—thus requiring the services of the “exorcist” again!

Now, is it possible for a lost person who *sincerely invokes* the name of Jesus, and cries out to Him for help, to be freed from the grasp of demons (even though he isn’t saved)? Yes, it is! Jesus will respond to *anyone* who even *begins* to turn toward Him. Accounts abound today of people who were once tormented by “aliens” (which are nothing but demons)—but who, in desperation, cried out to Jesus for help. When they cried out to Jesus, the so-called “aliens” immediately left them. Thankfully, many of these people, having discovered that there is power in the name of Jesus, began to search the Bible for answers, and ended up receiving Christ as their Saviour; and the “aliens” have *never* returned to torment them again. Why? Because they are now indwelt by the Spirit of *Christ!* Though they didn’t know the Lord when they cried out to Jesus for deliverance from the demons, the demons left them as soon as they cried out to Jesus. Why? Because they were sincerely seeking the Lord; and Jesus heard their cry. On the other hand, false religionists who use Jesus’ name as a “good luck charm” do *not* have the power of God upon them; and they are playing with fire!

**Read Acts 19:11-20.**

Now, let’s get back to Jesus’ response to the Pharisees. Jesus had already asked several questions, to which the Pharisees had no answer. But Jesus wasn’t done yet. Jesus had two more questions for them. Let’s read them again. **(Read Matthew 12:28-29.)**

Jesus' casting out of demons was "the real deal"; and everyone knew it. The trail of radically transformed lives that Jesus left everywhere He went was the proof that He is the Messiah! **Mary Magdalene**, who had once been possessed by seven devils, was one of them. She loved Jesus so much, that she followed Him nearly everywhere He went. The one-time **maniac of Gadara**, who had had *hundreds* of demons in him, was one of them. He went all over the region that we call "the Golan Heights," telling people what Jesus had done for him. What did this mean, then? It meant that Jesus is the King of Israel, and that the Kingdom of God truly was at the door—if Israel would receive it! The 1,000-year Kingdom of Heaven on earth, as well as the *spiritual* Kingdom of God, could come *within their lifetimes*, if they would receive Jesus as their King. That is why Jesus said, ***"If I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you."*** Jesus' point is that if He could bind Satan and his demons, and cast them out of people whenever He willed, then it should be obvious that the Kingdom of God was near! How did Jesus' power over demons prove that the Kingdom was near? Because the binding of Satan and his demons is the *first* thing that the Messiah will do when He returns to earth to set up His Kingdom (after He destroys His enemies in the Battle of Armageddon, of course)! When Christ returns to earth, He will bind Satan, and cast him and all his angels into the bottomless pit; and for 1,000 years, He will reign over the whole world from Jerusalem. During those 1,000 years, Satan will *not* be able to deceive the nations!

**Read Isaiah 24:21-23.**

**Read Revelation 20:1-6.**

During the 3 ½ years of Jesus' ministry, Jesus "bound" the enemy time and time again. He defeated Satan during his forty days of fasting and temptation in the wilderness; and with that victory won, Jesus went out to loose multitudes of people from the chains of demonic possession. Even Jesus' twelve Apostles failed, on at least one occasion, to cast demons out of a man, because of their lack of faith; but *Jesus* did not fail even once! Whenever the Son of God showed up, the demons *had* to leave people! There was no struggle, either. The demons left *immediately!* Furthermore, not *one* of the demons that *Jesus* cast out ever returned to torment that person. Jesus "bound" Satan's angels thousands of times during His earthly ministry. This is why Jesus said, ***"How can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house."*** Jesus didn't say that He had bound Satan *finally*, or *permanently*: He was simply saying that the day is coming when He *will* bind Satan once and for all. Jesus' release of people from demonic possession was the proof that one day, He will lock up that old serpent for *good*.

Someday, Satan will be bound and expelled from this world. However, we don't have to wait until the end of the world to see Satan bound. *Every day*, Satan and his angels are being expelled from the lives (and, sometimes, even from the *bodies*) of individuals, when those individuals place their faith in Jesus Christ, and surrender their lives to Him. In **1 John 4:4**, the Apostle John says to Christians, ***"Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world."*** The Spirit of Christ lives *inside* every true Christian; and Satan is on the *outside*. Satan *cannot* get *inside* a true believer, because every believer is sealed with the Holy Spirit of God. This is why it is our job, as believers, to tell people how they, too, can be freed from the snare of the devil!

## Read 2 Timothy 2:24-26.

Folks, there is only one way to be delivered from Satan's kingdom, and to enter God's Kingdom; and Jesus *is* that Way! Jesus said, "***I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me.***" There is no room for neutrality. There can be no sitting on the fence. Jesus made this very clear. Let's read **Matthew 12:30** again. (**Read Matthew 12:30.**) Either you are for Jesus, or against Him. Either you are advancing His Kingdom, or are *fighting against* it. Either you are gathering souls into God's Kingdom, or you are scattering them away. This is what the Pharisees did: they *scattered people away*. The Pharisees were always right there, whenever Jesus did a miracle or cast out a demon, to try to intimidate and scatter those who were *considering* becoming followers of Jesus; and this was a grievous sin! Yet, were the *Pharisees* the only ones who were "against" Jesus? No. You see, you don't *have* to be actively, purposely turning people away from Jesus to be "against" Him; all you have to do to be *against* Jesus is not to be *for* Him. All you have to do to be "against" Jesus is not to come to Him, and receive His gift of salvation. "But, Pastor, can't I just believe that Jesus was a good teacher, or a good man, or a prophet, without surrendering my *life* to Him? Surely I won't be in trouble with God on judgment day, as long as I wasn't actively *opposing* Him, will I?" No, my friend: that is not possible. You must either believe on Him, and place your soul to Him for safekeeping, or be found guilty of *rejecting* Him. One is either for Him, or against Him. Which are you?

## II. The condemnation of the Pharisees (vv. 31-32)

(**Read Matthew 12:31-32 again.**) In Scripture, seven sins against the Holy Spirit are mentioned. These sins are: lying to the Holy Spirit; quenching the Spirit; grieving (or vexing) the Spirit; rebelling against the Spirit; resisting the Holy Spirit; tempting the Spirit; and blaspheming against the Holy Spirit. However, of these seven, "blasphemy against the Holy Ghost" is probably the one that strikes the most fear in people. What, exactly, *is* the "blasphemy against the Holy Ghost," and what must you do to be guilty of it? And if Christ paid for *all* our sins on the cross, why can't even this sin be forgiven?

To answer these questions, we first need to look at the context of this passage. The context is that the Pharisees had just accused Jesus of casting out devils "***by Beelzebub the prince of the devils.***" Jesus called what they were doing "***the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost,***" because they were calling Jesus' casting out of devils (which was the work of the Holy Spirit) the work of Satan. They were blaspheming, or "speaking against," the Holy Spirit.

In light of this, the next obvious question is: "Can blasphemy against the Holy Spirit be committed today? Or was this a unique, one-off offence that was committed by the Pharisees in Jesus' day?" The answer is: Yes, this offence *can* be committed today. In fact, it is committed all the time! You don't have to have seen Jesus casting out devils during His earthly ministry to be guilty of attributing the work of the Holy Spirit to Satan. Anytime a sinner feels the conviction of the Holy Spirit in His heart, yet refuses to acknowledge that it is *the Lord* speaking and drawing him to repentance, he is blaspheming the Holy Spirit. He is calling the work of the Holy Spirit "evil": and in doing so, he is rejecting his only "lifeline" to salvation. Many people, after hearing the Gospel, feel strongly convicted of their sin, and are able to see, for the first time in their lives, that salvation is not through good works or rituals,

but by faith in Christ alone. Yet, many refuse to believe that this conviction in their heart is from God. Instead, they convince themselves that *the devil* is trying to trick them, and damn their soul. They spurn the conviction in their heart as “evil,” and close their hearts and ears to the truth. (I once *literally* saw a lady put their hands over her ears and start yelling “No, no, no!” when I tried to share the Gospel with her!)

My friends, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is a sin that can be committed *only* by a lost person. A saved person will *not* call the Spirit of God accursed. In light of this fact, another important question remains: Can a person who has blasphemed the Holy Spirit ever be saved? The answer is “Yes”—*if* he will *stop* blaspheming the Spirit, and heed His call to salvation! Let’s look at an example of a man who once blasphemed the Holy Spirit, but then got *saved!*

### **Read Acts 9:1-20.**

Before Saul of Tarsus became a Christian, he was a Pharisee; and he hated Jesus vehemently. He blasphemed Jesus’ name, and “kicked against the pricks” of the Spirit’s conviction in his heart. Years after his conversion, Paul confessed that before his salvation, he had been “***a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious.***” Not only did he himself blaspheme Jesus, but he “***compelled***” the Christians whom he put on trial to “***blaspheme***” the name of Jesus too, or else die a horrible death. When the enraged mob at Stephen’s trial took up stones to stone him to death, Saul of Tarsus was there to assist them; and he did it with glee. Without question, Saul *was* guilty of attributing the work of the Holy Spirit to Satan, just as all the other Pharisees did. Yet, there came a day when Saul *stopped* blaspheming the Holy Ghost. Though he had grievously blasphemed the Son of man, he suddenly *stopped* blaspheming—*after* he had stopped blaspheming the Holy Spirit! When he finally recognised the conviction in his heart as the work of the Holy Spirit, and *surrendered* to His conviction, he received the “lifeline” of salvation, and bowed his heart to the Son of God.

Without the convicting work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, we cannot be saved. He reproves us of sin, righteousness, and judgment. His points us to Christ, and woos and draws us to Him. However, He doesn’t *force* us to believe on Jesus; He merely *invites* us. We must choose either to receive His call, or reject it. *That* is why blaspheming the Holy Spirit is so serious! To call His convicting work “evil,” and to spurn and reject *Him*, is to refuse the gift of salvation. *That* is why the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit can never be forgiven!

**Conclusion:** There came a day when Saul of Tarsus stopped blaspheming the Spirit of God, and submitted to the call to salvation. There was a day when Afrooz stopped blaspheming the Holy Spirit, and submitted to the call of salvation. Have *you* done this? Have *you* stopped kicking against the pricks of the Holy Spirit, and received Christ as your Saviour? If not, I urge you to do so today! If you are already saved, you cannot *blaspheme* the Holy Spirit, and end up in hell; but you certainly can grieve Him, and quench His convicting work in your heart, by stubbornly rejecting His will, and persisting in disobedience. Should *you* be living in disobedience, Christian, do not remain in this state one day longer! Submit to the Holy Spirit, and get your heart right with the Lord today!

<sup>1</sup> The Voice of the Martyrs, *i am n* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2016), p. 97.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 97-98.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*



<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p. 99.