

## ***The Unpardonable Sin-Mark 3:21-30***

Derek Berry  
Calvary Baptist Church  
May 28, 2023

*[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions, please get in touch with Pastor Derek at [dberry@calvarybaptistsc.church](mailto:dberry@calvarybaptistsc.church).]*

Take your copy of God's Word and meet me in Mark 3:21-30...

As human beings, we tend to be cynical people. Whenever an organization or individual claims to be a proponent of a particular social or religious agenda, we often question whether the individual or organization is authentic. Perhaps we have reason to be cynical based on the history of humanity. Often, individuals will claim to be proponents of an agenda with a desire to break systems of oppression while simultaneously propagating the structures they desire to eradicate. So perhaps humans give us reason to be cynical. We hear the words, "We're here to help," and our experience tells us they often aren't.

And maybe we apply this cynicism to God himself. Perhaps you're here this morning, and you've been there. You've questioned whether or not God is as genuine as preachers claim him to be because, in your experience, people's motives are often mixed. In our text this morning, a religious group questions the Lord Jesus and his authenticity. They charge him with casting out demons by the power of Satan, consequently labeling him an advocate of Satan instead of God the Father. Jesus responds with a parable that teaches that he's come to the earth to destroy the works of Satan, not further them. So, let's dive in and discover how that's relevant in our lives today. Here are our points this morning:

- I. A Charge by the Scribes (vv. 21-22)**
- II. A Counter from the Savior (vv. 23-27)**
- III. A Clemency Suppressed (vv. 28-30)**

As somewhat of an appetizer of an insult, Jesus's own family deems him as out of his mind in verse 21. Most likely referring to his siblings, who didn't believe his claim to be the Son of God. But there's one thing to be called out of your mind; we're dealing with a totally different category with verse 22.

Who are these scribes? They were the primary bible scholars of their day. What was once the role of the priests had now become the scribe's duty. Ezra, the man who taught Israel God's Word after building the Jerusalem walls, was a scribe. To be clear, to hold the position of a scribe was not inherently evil. The gospels give examples of scribes drawn to Jesus and his teaching. And the leading scribes in the Book of Acts were not uniformly opposed to the church. However, more times than not, we find that the religious leaders and teachers of Christ's day were his primary opponents. We've already seen in chapter two that the scribes were angry with Jesus because of his claim to be able to forgive sins and his willingness to eat with sinners.

Now once again, we find these scholars opposing Jesus. Why the opposition? The bottom line is because of their hard hearts. They aren't denying that Jesus isn't genuinely casting out the demons. They're unable to deny the miraculous power that's on full display. However, their hard hearts will not allow them to recognize Jesus as Messiah and bend a knee. Prayerfully this doesn't describe you this morning. Someone who concedes that miracles are taking place, but you attribute them to stars and signs as opposed to the one true God of the Bible. If this is you, you're in the right place this morning.

Who is Beelzebul? This designation or title has a tricky and complicated origin. Based on the context and Jesus' usage of a "house" in verse 27, it most likely means "lord of the dwelling." Suffice it to say that by Jesus' day, the name became a synonym for Satan, the prince of the demons. So, because these scribes can't in good conscience deny the miraculous work of Jesus, they get the bright idea of claiming that Jesus is practicing witchcraft by casting out demons by the power of Satan, which brings us to our second point, **A Counter from the Savior**.

Let's consider verse 23. We're really going to hone in on parables and their importance in the next chapter. Parables can take on a broad range of literary forms; however, what's fundamental to each of these forms is a comparison of two different things—something (A) is compared to something else (B). And we'll consider those parables momentarily. But Jesus begins his counter with a rhetorical question. "How can Satan cast out Satan?" This is an utterly ridiculous claim. But it shows you to what extent we, as sinful and hard-hearted humans, will go to deny God. Instead of believing in intelligent design, some claim everything came from nothing. This an absolutely ludicrous claim that's come to be accepted in many circles because the alternative would mean affirming God, which implies submitting to him. Don't underestimate how far a hard heart will go to deny the Lord Jesus, even if it means making claims that reject basic biological rules that God has put in place, as we see now in our culture.

Let's reread verses 24-25. I think it's important that we first consider an essential principle regarding division and unity. Not all unity is of God, and not all division is of the devil. In other words, there's a type of unity that God hates and a type of division that God brings. For instance, the tower of Babel involved great unity; however, God hated it and scattered the people. Also, Jesus tells his disciples,

*<sup>34</sup> "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. <sup>35</sup> For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. <sup>36</sup> And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. <sup>37</sup> Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. <sup>38</sup> And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. -Matthew 10:34-38*

So, Christianity itself is a highly disruptive force. Many of you with nonbelieving families can relate, I'm sure. So, this text before us is not meant to make us one-dimensional in how we consider division but instead proves a larger point. And that is, it would be nonsensical for Satan to work against his kingdom. If he did, his kingdom wouldn't stand; however, it is standing, so he's not working against it. That's not to say that his kingdom won't fall because it will, but it won't be because Satan is working against himself. Jesus will be the one to bring down his kingdom once and for all. More on this momentarily.

But a kingdom divided doesn't stand; consider the nation of Israel. A house divided against itself, which may refer to a royal family, doesn't stand either! By way of implication, Satan indeed has a kingdom that is standing. Consider verse 26. His kingdom consists of other fallen angels, known as demons. And the New Testament tells us what the business of his kingdom is. We're not ignorant of the schemes of the evil one. Here are twelve ways the New Testament informs us that the kingdom of Satan stands and works against God's people.

1. Preach a false gospel!

*<sup>13</sup> For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. <sup>14</sup> And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. <sup>15</sup> So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds. -2 Corinthians 11:13-15*

Satan doesn't primarily come as the scary-looking creature with horns, a red cape, and a pitchfork. When people think of Satan, they often think of rockstars biting bats' heads off. Now he's there, no doubt, but he primarily comes as the seemingly meek and kind individual preaching a different gospel.

2. Provides false religion.

*<sup>20</sup> No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. -1 Corinthians 10:20*

So the false idols that the pagan gentiles were worshipping were actually demons. It's the plan of the kingdom of darkness to provide confusion and false religions to keep people off the scent of the only one who can save humanity, the Lord Jesus. And it's the enemy's plan to have you thinking you're intolerant if you acknowledge that Jesus is the only way to the Father.

3. Rely on ourselves

*Then Satan stood against Israel and incited David to number Israel. -1 Chronicles 21:1*

He incited David to rely on his strength in numbers. And he provokes us to depend on ourselves that we're enough alone. "You don't need community or the church! Don't get close to anyone; they'll only hurt you." That's the enemy! You can't do it alone. God has not designed it that way. You must rely on him and his people.

4. Destroy our bodies that he may destroy our faith

*<sup>16</sup> And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?" -Luke 13:16*

Like Job, Satan attacks our bodies in various ways so that we may curse God. However, God uses those same situations to build our faith. Don't allow adversity in your life to fall into the enemy's ploy.

*<sup>4</sup> Then Satan answered the Lord and said, "Skin for skin! All that a man has he will give for his life. <sup>5</sup> But stretch out your hand and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face." -Job 2:4-5*

5. Keep God's people bitter.

*<sup>26</sup> Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, <sup>27</sup> and give no opportunity to the devil. -Ephesians 4:26-27*

I've been here more times than I can count. The enemy wants to keep you bitter and angry at your spouse, children, family, and fellow church members. If there's bitterness you're holding on to, the enemy's plan in your life is working.

6. Puff us with pride.

*<sup>6</sup> He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. -1 Timothy 3:6*

He doesn't mind ensuring your success if that means you'll be filled with pride.

7. Keeps sin in the dark.

*<sup>3</sup> But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? -Acts 5:3*

To make a short story even shorter, Ananias sinned and tried to cover it up and lie about it. The devil doesn't want you to bring your secret sin to the light. He wants you to keep it to yourself and lie to others by telling them you're fine. He knows that when evil deeds are exposed and brought to the light, they lose their potency and power over us. Believer, open yourself to another believer if you're here and are hiding a secret sin.

8. Persecutes God's people.

*<sup>17</sup> Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus. And he stood on the sand of the sea. -Revelation 12:17*

He's been doing this all along. He knows his arms are too short to box with God; therefore, he aims at those who are made in his image, particularly those who have been remade in the image of Christ. He raises up evil leaders who persecute God's people; however, God ordains it to purify his people.

9. Tempts us with sin.

*<sup>5</sup> Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. -1 Corinthians 7:5*

He's been doing this from the very beginning. His ploys are the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. All three were present at the temptations of Eve and Jesus, and as stated last week, old dogs don't learn new tricks. He desires to plunge us into sin's bondage.

10. Accuses God's people.

*<sup>10</sup> And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. -Revelation 12:10*

He accuses the people of God, much like he did Job. Conviction over sin is from the Spirit, and condemnation is from the devil; recognize the difference. We aren't condemned because we can always point to the blood of the Lord Jesus, where the penalty of our sin was paid.

*<sup>11</sup> And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. -Revelation 12:11*

#### 11. Division in churches

*<sup>10</sup> Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. Indeed, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ,<sup>11</sup> so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs. -2 Corinthians 2:10-11*

This goes back to the principle we read in verses 24-25. A divided local church cannot and will not stand. Perhaps you've seen it. Churches split, relationships ruined, and the reputation of Christ sullied all because of a divided church. We must aggressively avoid this at all costs. To make it more plain, Satan hates Calvary Baptist Church and desires to cause us to divide. We must be on guard, whether finances, preferences over the services, or even interpersonal relationships. This is why I have us pray for unity almost every Wednesday during the prayer meeting. It was important enough for Jesus to pray during his priestly prayer in John 17.

And lastly, verse 25 had me thinking about the effects of the fall in general. Maybe you're not a stranger to divided, dysfunctional homes. Perhaps like me, you've grown up in one. Have you ever wondered how things got this way? And if there's a way to fix it. The Bible reveals the answer. Consider verse 27 and how it points to a large truth.

Jesus reveals how the kingdom of Satan will be overthrown. It will not self-destruct from within but be invaded from without. In this parable, Jesus is the strong man, and the house is the world as the sphere of Satan's authority. Jesus kicks down the door and ties up Satan, who has no power to fight back! And then the goods within the house are the demon-possessed individuals. The plundering of the house represents Jesus casting out the demons, thus saving them from the control of Satan. This topples the idea that Jesus is somehow an agent of witchcraft while casting out demons.

Although this is the immediate context of Jesus' parable, it points to a broader truth regarding the fall and Jesus' work as the God-King. Why is the world the sphere of Satan's authority? Why is it that Paul calls him the lower-case god of this world? Why does the Apostle John say that the whole world lies within the power of the evil one? Because this is all a result of the initial fall of man in Genesis 3. We had a royal position as priest-kings. The world was humanity's domain where we were meant to rule as

vice-regents of the Most High God! However, this changed when Adam followed the serpent's lies instead of the truth of God's Word. From that point on, Satan became the god of this world, and there's not one area of society left unaffected by sin entering the world.

However, as our sister read earlier, none of this caught God off guard. From the beginning, God had a plan to send the seed of the woman to reverse the devastating effects of Satan's lie. This is what Jesus' first coming and the gospel accomplished. Listen to the words of the Apostle Paul:

*<sup>13</sup> And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, <sup>14</sup> by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.<sup>15</sup> He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him. -Colossians 2:13-15*

The gospel of Jesus is the ultimate binding of Satan and the plundering of his goods. Remember the concept of already but not yet? Or inaugurated eschatology. This means that Jesus has come and inaugurated his kingdom; it's here but not yet in its full form. By inaugurating his kingdom, he provided us with what the coming consummated kingdom will look like, and he defeated the devil by dying for the sins of his people. Therefore, we get a glimpse of what is to come in our interactions. We no longer have to have broken homes because of the gospel. We no longer have to have damaged marriages because of the gospel. Kids no longer have to be neglected because of the gospel. We no longer have to hate each other because of the gospel. And we no longer are slaves to the evil one because of the gospel. There's still a not yet to the kingdom, so we still battle with sin and brokenness. But we long for the day of Jesus' return, whereas Paul says Christ will crush Satan under our feet. We get to participate in the fulfilled prophecy in Genesis 3.

*<sup>20</sup> The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. -Romans 16:20*

This is the gospel! Our God wins, and we share in his victory.

We now move to our final point this morning, **A Clemency Suppressed**. Let's read verse 28. Let's take a second to consider the weight of what was uttered. Jesus offers his people the forgiveness of sins. Has that truly gripped you? On July 17, 2015, Dylann Roof walked into Emanuel African Methodist Church with hate in his heart and murder on his mind. After firing approximately 74 rounds, he claimed the lives of nine church members, killing mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, grandparents, and friends. What's

most bizarre is what came out of the mouths of the surviving family members. A daughter of one of the victims said, "I will never be able to hold her again, but I forgive you." A sister of another stated, "We have no room for hating, so we have to forgive."

What!? This makes no sense. This wicked man claimed these individuals' lives simply because of their skin color, yet their family members forgave him. I'm willing to venture out and say that they can forgive because they realize what they've been forgiven of. They're unable to ignore the scandal of the cross. Because of the holiness of God, we are vile in the sight of God, and therefore we, too, deserve an eternity apart from him in hell. That is the penalty of sin. However, the gospel offers us forgiveness. Have you responded to the gospel this morning? Listen to the words of the Spirit through Paul: *And you were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup> in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— <sup>3</sup> among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. <sup>4</sup> But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— <sup>6</sup> and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast. -Ephesians 2:1-9*

However, there is a sin in which forgiveness is not offered. Let's read verses 29-30. So how were these scribes committing the unpardonable sin? Verse 30 clarifies the uniqueness of their wickedness. By contributing Jesus' Holy Spirit-filled work to the work of Satan, these scribes were blaspheming the Spirit in a unique way in which forgiveness is not offered. Verse 28 is meant to highlight the severity of this sin.

Considering the uniqueness of this sin in the ministry of Jesus, how does this apply today? Well, in a sense, this sin is committed whenever someone rejects the Spirit's testimony regarding their own condition and the person and work of Christ so consistently that their hearts become unable to believe. I remember when I used to work out with gloves. But I kept forgetting them, and my hands became so callous that I ditched needing them because my hands became so hard from consistently working out without them.



This can happen to our hearts if we consistently reject the gospel of the Lord Jesus. We assume we have all the time in the world, but this simply isn't true. Paul says today is the day of salvation, don't wait lest your window of believing closes. Listen to Scripture:

*<sup>11</sup> Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, <sup>12</sup> in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness. -2 Thessalonians 2:11-12*

*<sup>17</sup> For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears. -Hebrews 12:17*

Kent Hughes tells the story of a pastor named Ben Haden. Ben visited a dying man in the hospital whom he had known for years. Pastor asked the man how it was between him and the Lord. He said, "Oh, I've always believed in God, and I know everything is shipshape." Ben asked him what he believed about Jesus. "I've known God all my life, and I've tried to observe godly standards. I've been honest in business, and I've worked hard." Ben asks again how it is between him and Jesus. "I've never made a place in my life for Jesus. I don't believe in Jesus. If I were to believe in Jesus, it would upset everything in my philosophy and my life, and I would have to rethink everything about me." Ben tells him that by the grace of God, he has time to rethink those things now. "No, I will die without Jesus." Ben asks him, "Why then do you think Jesus died?" The man responds, "Oh, I understand he died for sins." "Your sins?" asked Ben. "Perhaps, perhaps, but it's too late in my life to rethink the place of Jesus." And then he died.

This knowledgeable man, who had heard the gospel preached to him over and over again died resolutely rejecting Christ. Dear friends, be not like the scribes or this man. Receive the gospel of the Lord Jesus this morning if you haven't. There's no prescribed number of times you can reject before getting to this point; therefore, you should respond to the call immediately. Surrender all to him by faith and repentance.

And there's even a nugget of admonishment for the believer. Thankfully you're not in danger of the unpardonable sin if you're in Christ. However, the instruction for you is to submit daily to the Spirit of God. Do not grieve Him. Do not quench Him. But instead, submit to him so you don't find yourself in broken fellowship.

*<sup>30</sup> And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. <sup>31</sup> Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. <sup>32</sup> Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. -Ephesians 4:30-32*

Let's pray.