

IS THERE ANY SUCH THING AS AN UNFORGIVABLE SIN?
LUKE 22:31-34

INTRODUCTION:

- A. We've spent the summer tracing the conversations of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke. We've called the series, *Hello, Jesus. Can We Meet for Coffee?*
- B. What if Jesus said yes, and you had an appointment with him tomorrow morning at Starbucks? I bet you'd call all your friends...*Guess who I'm meeting for coffee tomorrow?!*
You're kidding! How cool! What a lucky dog you are! Hey, what are you going to talk to Him about? What questions are you going to ask Him.
You hang up with your mind racing...Got to write down an agenda. This is way too important a meeting to just wing it.
You meet with Jesus. You do the preliminary pleasantries. Then Jesus gets serious. I have something heavy to tell you. Satan has put in a special request to run you through his meat grinder. And I can tell you right now, you're going to come out in little pieces. Let me come right to the point. You going to be in an early meeting tomorrow morning with your board of directors, and before the morning commute is over, you are going to do everything you can to convince the directors that you have absolutely nothing to do with me.
- C. Whoa...pretty heavy stuff. I think we could qualify that as sin. Could am sin like that be forgiven...or is it curtains for you as far as Heaven is concerned?
- D. Let's use this as our jumping off point to get into this question: *Is there any such thing as an unforgivable sin?*

I. WHERE DID THE FEAR ORIGINATE?

- A. Certain Scriptures
 - 1. **Matthew 12:32**, *The sin against the Holy Spirit* (Cf. Mark 3:22-30; Luke 11:14-23)
Full text starting at **Verse 22**: *Then they brought him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see.*
23 All the people were astonished and said, "Could this be the Son of David?"
24 But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, "It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons [in other words, Satan himself], that this fellow drives out demons."
25 Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand.
26 If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand?
27 And if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your people drive them out? So then, they will be your judges.
28 But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.
29 "Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can rob his house.
30 "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters.
31 And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.
32 Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

NOTES: The three characteristics of this sin:

1) It is directed against the Holy Spirit: *there is such a thing as opposition to divine influence, so persistent and deliberate, because of constant preference of darkness to light, that repentance, and therefore forgiveness, becomes impossible. The efficacy of divine grace remains undiminished, but the sinner has brought himself to such a condition that its operation on him is excluded.* (Plummer in Ryrie, 53)

2) It was determined by a special situation. *It was sin committed to His (Christ's) face. The committing of this specific sin required the presence of Christ on the earth... [But] Attributing the works of the Son of God to Satan was the unpardonable sin in Jesus' day, and rejecting the evidence of His power in any day is also an unpardonable sin.* (Ryrie, 54)

One author raises the question as to why sins against Jesus could be forgiven, but not sins against the Holy Spirit. His answer: *[T]he time of Jesus' earthly ministry was a time of ambiguity even for the disciples (Mark 9:30-31)... But in the post-Easter setting, the presence of the Spirit and the presence of Jesus were rarely distinguished.... The meaning of this sin... is best viewed as a total and persistent denial of the presence of God in Christ.... Rather than a particular act, it is a disposition of the will.... A blatant hostility to God.* (G. M. Burge, "Sin, Unpardonable," Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Baker, 1984, 1017)

3) It was eternally damning to the soul (verse 32). *Since man withdraws self from all possible contact with God* (Ryrie, 54)

2. **I John 5:16**, *There is a sin that leads to death*

16 If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that he should pray about that.

Probably a reference to so-called brothers who apostasized from the faith and became false teachers. Cf., Numbers 15:30, *"But anyone who sins defiantly, whether native-born or alien, blasphemes the LORD, and that person must be cut off from his people.*

31 Because he has despised the LORD's word and broken his commands, that person must surely be cut off; his guilt remains on him."

17 All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death.

3. **Hebrews 6:4-6**, **[Apostasy or Hypothetical warning??]** *impossible to be brought back to repentance*

Hebrews 6:4 It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit,

5 who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age,

*6 if they fall away, to be brought back to **repentance**, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.*

7 Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God.

8 But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned.

9 Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case-- things that accompany salvation.

10 God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.

B. Church History

1. **Suicide:** *The traditional Christian view has no direct support from the Bible.... It was formulated by Augustine and other early Fathers of the Church. Augustine condemned suicide on the grounds that it was self-murder; that it precluded any opportunity for repentance; and that it was a cowardly act.*

- These views found expression in church law, by which suicide was denounced by a series of church councils... (JD Douglas, ed., The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church, 938, "Suicide" by Oonagh McDonald)*
2. *In the year 452, the Council of Arles became the first church conclave to condemn suicide. The Second Council of Orleans in 533 ordered that offerings or oblations be refused for suicides.... During the Middle Ages, civil law began to follow the teaching of the church and prohibited suicide. Desecration of the corpse of a suicide became standard practice. It wasn't until 1882 that Britain ordered that suicides could have normal burials.*
 3. *There are still Christians today who believe that anyone who commits suicide will go to hell. I read one recent report of a daughter at the wake of her mother who had committed suicide. Another church member approached her there and "She told me my mother was in hell." (Peri-Stone-Palmquist, "Suicide—A Preventable Tragedy?" CT, June 12, 2000, 74*
 4. *This is no small concern for people: Suicide is the 8th leading cause of death in America: approximately 30,000 deaths per year, more than the number of murders (19,000) and deaths due to AIDS (13,000). (1998 stats cited in Peri-Stone-Palmquist, "Suicide—A Preventable Tragedy?" CT, June 12, 2000, 74)*
 5. *Suicide is the second-leading cause of death among teenagers. (John Baucom, Fatal Choice, Moody Press, June 1986 book review in Moody Monthly, June, 1986)*
 6. **Mortal sins:** *The Roman Catholic Church has classically segregated sin into two categories: mortal and venial sins.*
 - Mortal sin is defined as that which "kills" grace in the soul. For Catholics, this grace may be renewed by the sacrament of penance. (Geisler, 61)*
 - Mortal sins make the offender an enemy of God, and condemn him to the penalty of hell fire. Three criteria:*
 - o *A grave matter*
 - o *Full knowledge*
 - o *Full consent (FCH Dreyer, Roman Catholicism in the Light of Scripture, 85-86)*

II. HOW CAN I ADDRESS THE FEAR?

A. Take Hope from Peter's Story

1. **READ TEXT: Luke 22:31**, *"Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. [Skip verse 32] 33 But he replied, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death." 34 Jesus answered, "I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me."*
2. **Fulfillment: Luke 22:54**, *Then seizing him, they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest. Peter followed at a distance. 55 But when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down with them. 56 A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, "This man was with him." 57 But he denied it. "Woman, I don't know him," he said. 58 A little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them." "Man, I am not!" Peter replied. 59 About an hour later another asserted, "Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean." 60 Peter replied, "Man, I don't know what you're talking about!" Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. 61 The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times."*

- 62 *And he went outside and wept bitterly.*
3. Jesus' prayer for Peter: 32 *But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."*
 4. Mark 16:7, *But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'" [an angel to the women at the empty tomb]*
 5. I Corinthians 15:5, *and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve.*
 6. "Jesus reinstates Peter": John 21:15, *When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."*
 7. Pentecost sermon in Acts 2. Result: 3,000 baptized!!!
- B. Take Hope from David's Story
1. I Samuel 11. David's sin with Bathsheba, wife of Uriah the Hittite, one of David's celebrated Mighty Men—each a one-man army! (cf. II Samuel 23:39).
 2. I Samuel 12, Nathan confronts David.

Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.'

11 *"This is what the LORD says: 'Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity upon you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight.*

12 *You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel."*

13 *Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." Nathan replied, "**The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die.***

14 *But because by doing this you have made the enemies of the LORD show utter contempt, the son born to you will die."*

III. WHAT IF THE FEAR PERSISTS?

- A. If You Are Worried About It, Relax, You Haven't Done It!
1. Romans 8 security

30 *And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.*

31 *What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?*

32 *He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all-- how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?*

33 *Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.*

34 *Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died-- more than that, who was raised to life-- is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.*

35 *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?*

36 *As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."*

37 *No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.*

38 ***For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,***

39 ***neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.***
 2. **II Timothy 2:25** *Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them **repentance** leading them to a knowledge of the truth,*
 - If you have sinned, and now you regret and you want to come to God...guess where that "change of mind" [repentance] started? It started with God.

- God doesn't bait people. He doesn't lead them to repentance and then slam the door in their face. What starts, he intends to finish. If your heart has turned to repentance, relax. God is calling you back home!
- 3. This is the ***Good News of the Gospel!***
 - Scotsman Murdough McDonald, WW II paratrooper.**
 - I'm not sure I'm in favor of repentance. Sinners are the ones who get the work done. A strong sense of personal guilt is what makes people willing to serve on committees. (Garrison Keillor, quoted in U. S. catholic, Mar 2000, 6)*

Garrison has it wrong this time: It's not guilt that motivates God's people...It's grace!

B. If You Are Still Worried, Reconsider Grace

1. Who can put a limit on the grace of God??? **Romans 5:20**, *But where sin increased, grace increased all the more,*
2. **John Bunyan**, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. You know John Bunyan as the 17th century British preacher and author of the celebrated book, *Pilgrim's Progress*. What you don't know is what a hardened sinner he was before he became a Christian.
 - It was my delight to be taken captive by the devil at his will... I had but few equals for cursing, swearing, lying and blaspheming the holy name of God.*
 - ...I often wished that either there were no Hell, or if there were that I could be a devil, for I supposed that it would be better to be a tormenter rather than to be tormented myself.*
 - I let loose the reins of my lust and delighted in all transgressions against the law of God; so I was the ringleader in all manner of vice and ungodliness...*
 - Then I said to God, "Depart from me for I desire not a knowledge of thy ways" (Job 21:14). By this time I was free from everything good.... As for being saved or being damned, I cared not in the least.*

3. THE HOUND FROM HEAVEN

One man who ignored and fled from God for many years, finally turned in faith to the Lord and found out what it was like to be on the good side of God. He thought how through all those lonely, wayward years the Holy Spirit had been lovingly pursuing him like a relentless Hound of Heaven. Then Frances Thompson, an opium using, unhealthy bootmaker got off the edge of the bed, faced his loving pursuer and wrote these words,

*I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;
 I fled Him down the arches of the years;
 I fled Him down the labyrinthine ways
 Of my own mind; and in the midst of tears
 I hid from Him, and under running laughter.
 Up vistaed hopes, I sped;
 And shot, precipitated
 Adown Titanic glooms of chasmed fears,
 From those strong feet that followed, followed after.
 But with unhurrying chase,
 And unperturbed pace,
 Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
 They beat - and a Voice beat
 More instant than the feet -
 "All things betray thee, who betrayest Me."*

SKIP TO LAST STANZA:

Halts by me that footfall:

*Is my gloom, after all,
Shade of His hand, outstretched caressingly?
“Ah, fondest, blindest, weakest,
I am He whom thou seekest!
Thou dravest love from thee, who dravest Me.*

-Francis Thompson, 1983

4. Paul: chief of sinners...I am an example of God's saving grace
 - Ephesians 3:8, less than the least
 - I Timothy 1:15-16, I am the worst...an example
 - I Corinthians 15:9, least of apostles—persecuted the church of God
 - Galatians 1:13, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it
5. **John Bunyan**, at the end of his life: *Sometimes when I have sinned and have looked for a great chastening from the hand of God, instead I have made new discoveries of His grace. (Grace Abounding... 117)*

CONCLUSION:

- A. **John Bunyan** began to move toward Jesus, but not without many fears and doubts: *If the sin were speaking some word against the Holy Spirit then my mouth seemed ready to speak that word whether I let it or not. The temptation was so strong upon me that I often pressed my hands under my chin to hold my mouth from opening; at other times I leaped head down into some mudhole to keep my mouth from speaking (Grace Abounding, 40)*

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