

95-02-12Mark

...out of his mind, and the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said he has Beelzebub, and by the ruler of demons he casts out demons. So he called them to himself 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 cannot stand.

And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand but has an end. No one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods unless he first binds the strong man. Then he will plunder his house.

Assuredly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they may utter. But he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation. Because, they said, he has an unclean spirit.

The first thing that we see here is that this passage can be divided into three parts. If we look at that section, verses 20-30, it breaks into three distinct parts. The first part has to do with the visit of Jesus' family.

It starts out in verse 20 that the multitude has gathered, and in verse 21, his own people heard about this and they went out to lay hold of him. And when it says his own people, this is a reference to Jesus' family. This phrase in Greek has to do with those who are of him, those belonging to him.

And this is his family down in Nazareth. Nazareth is about 20 miles south and west of Capernaum, where Jesus and his disciples are. So news of what's going on has come down there and his family has come up to visit.

That's one section, the visit of the family. The second section is this accusation by the scribes that Jesus does what he does through the power of Satan. And Jesus hears this accusation and addresses it in this second section, which is verses 22-29.

And then in verse 30, we have the closing of a bracket here when he says, because they said he has an unclean spirit. We're going to see this morning the role of the Holy Spirit. We're going to address this thorny problem of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

And at the same time, we're going to see what is going on with this visit of Jesus' family. So like our scripture reading, we have some elements that don't really seem to fit together. They seem to be kind of isolated.

But I hope this morning to show you what the author here, what Mark is trying to tell us in this episode, because these are put together for a reason. We've seen that in the study of narrative in a story in the Bible, whether it's the Old Testament history or the New Testament Gospels, that

the details of the story communicate the truth. It isn't a homily, it isn't a deep theological discussion, it's a story.

And we look at the details of the story to find out what God wants us to learn. So in this story, we see that Jesus is back in the city, but he's not at the seashore. He's at the house, and this is probably Peter's house in Capernaum.

One of these days, maybe on a Wednesday night, I'll show you some slides, because this house has been uncovered in Capernaum. Archaeologists have found the house that belonged to Peter in Capernaum. You say, now how could they possibly know? Did they find Peter's inscribed wristwatch in there? How would they know that this particular house belonged to Peter? In the late 1800s, the town of Capernaum was identified, the ruins of Capernaum.

And as soon as it became known that this was the city that Jesus spent so much time in, some Catholic monks purchased the land where these ruins were to preserve it, because relic hunters and people that wanted to come in and get things that they could sell on the antiquities market were starting to dig it up and take things away. So the monks purchased this land in Capernaum and guarded it. And over the course of the next several decades, they did some excavations.

They began to dig the dirt away carefully and to find the foundations of the buildings. And one of the first things they identified was a synagogue in Capernaum. It's in the central part of the city, and the experts who know about such things recognized that this synagogue had been built in about 200 or 300 AD.

So this was not the synagogue that Jesus taught, but it was built over the site of the original synagogue. And they found the foundation of the original synagogue that Jesus did teach in underneath. And if you go to the Holy Land today and visit Capernaum, you can see this synagogue.

The floor has been uncovered, and it's there, it's fenced off, it has signs, and they have a little museum right there. About 80 feet away from this synagogue, they found an unusual house. This house was built of the same stones as the other houses in Capernaum, but there was a difference.

They found that on top of the foundation of this house had been built an octagonal chapel, or an eight-sided church. Eight-sided churches in the Holy Land always mark a special spot. If you go to where Jesus was born, if you go to the place where Jesus was crucified, you'll find these eight-sided churches.

Back during the Crusades in the Middle Ages, when they went around and identified these spots, every time they found one, they would build an eight-sided church. And this was a very old practice that went all the way back to shortly after the time of Christ. So they decided, well, there's something special about this house.

Why would they take this house and build this eight-sided church on it? So they did their excavations, and as they dug and they carefully brushed away the dirt, they discovered that underneath this eight-sided building were the original foundations and a couple of feet of the original walls. These walls had been plastered, and that's very unusual. There's no other house in Capernaum that had plastered walls.

Why would they plaster the walls? As they dug further, they discovered that this had originally been built as a dwelling probably 50 years or so B.C., 50 years before the birth of Christ. And so at the time that Jesus and Peter and Jesus' other disciples were in the area, this house would have been probably 80 or 90 years old. But the houses are built of rock.

There's really nothing to decay, and so it's not unusual for the house to be that old. They had the normal household utensils, cooking utensils, storage jars for olive oil, cooking pots, earthenware vessels for storing what they drank, and so forth. All of these things were present.

But at a certain point, they discovered that this was no longer used as a house. At the time that the walls were plastered, which was maybe 40 or 50 A.D., they estimate, it was no longer used as a house. But they found an abundance of oil lamps and fragments of oil lamps.

And they decided this was used as a public gathering place. Plastering the walls enhanced the light and also made it suitable as a public meeting place. And the only utensils that were used in there were lamps.

And so with that and a lot of other evidence, they found some inscriptions on the walls that were written in Aramaic as well as Greek that talked about Jesus Christ and talked about Peter and so forth. They concluded that this is in fact the site of Peter's house. And there's a floor plan of that house.

You can see the actual rooms and where the front door was and everything else. And all of the archaeological scholars agree that this is in all likelihood the house where Peter lived and where Jesus stayed when he was in Capernaum. So one of these Wednesday nights we'll have a treat.

I'll make some overhead slides and we'll take a look at that. That'll be fun. But Jesus and his disciples are in that house in Capernaum right now.

When you see the house, you'll see that you can't fit the people in and around that house that you could fit down by the seashore. When the crowds in Capernaum heard that Jesus was back from the mountain, they went down to the seashore and he wasn't there. They said, where is he? He said, well, he's up at Peter's house.

So everybody converged on that house. And they converged there for the very same reasons as they had gone to the seashore. Do you remember why they were there from the first part of this chapter? Why were they flocking to Jesus Christ? They wanted healing.

They wanted to see the spectacle. They wanted to see the miracles. I saw a man's withered hand restored.

I saw a blind man get his sight back. I saw a lame man get up and walk. I saw a demon-possessed man have the demon leave and he stood up and acted normal and was clothed and in his right mind.

These were spectacular things. And in sleepy villages like Capernaum, a fishing village, these were tremendously entertaining, tremendously exciting. Many of these people had diseases themselves and had problems themselves.

They thought, if I can only touch him, that problem will be cured. My blindness, my deafness, my inability to speak, my leprosy, whatever it may be, that can be cured if I can only see him, if I can only touch him. I've got to find him.

Where is he? He's at the house. Let's go to the house and find him. You recall earlier in this chapter, people were so anxious to be healed, they would fling themselves at him.

If I can just touch him in any way, it's like a goal line stand in a football game. If I can just leap over this crowd that surrounds him and touch him in any way, I will be healed. And this is what they were doing.

And it got so bad that Jesus had to ask the disciples to get a little boat to get him far enough away from the shore that people wouldn't be hurling themselves at him. Well, this begins to happen in the house. And notice it says that the crowd was so thick that they could not even eat bread.

They couldn't move around in the house to get a loaf of bread, to have a meal. Now, let me ask you something. It's important to understand the motivation of this crowd.

Why are these people here? We're going to see in other parts of Mark where people are going to come into a house and they're going to sit and they're going to listen to Jesus teach. But that's not what's happening here. In those situations, it doesn't say the disciples could not get a meal.

The disciples couldn't move and get a drink of water. They couldn't get a loaf of bread. Here, this crowd is different.

If Jesus Christ were here today and we believe that he was God's Son, Israel's Messiah, would we go over to the fellowship hall after the service and crowd around him and squeeze him into a corner so that he couldn't get to the table and get a meal? Would we treat him with that amount of disrespect? Those that recognize Jesus for who he is revered him or recognized him as the Son of God. They fell back, they fell on their face, they worshipped him. And in day-to-day contact, they didn't crush him, they didn't squeeze him, they didn't throw themselves at him.

The motivation of this crowd is selfish. They're there for what they can see, for what they can get. They do not recognize Jesus Christ as the Messiah.

And this is important because to understand why they are here helps us understand why Jesus says what he says in this passage. Now, it got so chaotic, it got so unmanageable, that people began to say, he is out of his mind. If you look at verse 21, it says, when his own people, which is his family, when his family heard about this, they went out to lay hold of him, for they said, he is out of his mind.

Now, who is the they that's saying Jesus is out of his mind? Is it the family or is it the crowd? That's an important question to ask. Jesus has been surrounded by crowds ever since he began his public ministry. When he was down by the seashore, these people were flinging themselves at him.

But why does his family come at this point? Because they have heard something that they didn't hear before. Down there in Nazareth, they've heard a new message. They've heard two things.

They've heard the scribes and Pharisees are now saying, he is acting under the power of Satan. And his family hears the crowds say, he is beside himself. He's out of his mind.

This word, or this phrase that's translated beside himself, literally means he is next to himself. He is beside himself is what it literally means. And because of that, they have come to take charge of him, to take hold of him.

And the word for take hold of is very interesting because sometimes it means to arrest, to grab somebody forcibly and drag them away. When Herod got tired of hearing John the Baptist preach against his marriage, he seized John the Baptist and put him in prison. And in Mark chapter 6 verse 17, this very same word, to take hold of, is used for Herod arresting John the Baptist.

This word is used of Jesus' enemies who want to get a hold of him because they don't like what he's saying about them. They have evil intent. And so this word is used.

They wanted to seize him. They wanted to grab him. But this word is also used in ways that are not negative.

Jesus talked about the fact that people would see their sheep fall into a ditch on the Sabbath. And would they not want to grab a hold of that sheep and rescue him from the pit? This very same word is used there. It is used in healing.

When Jesus would take someone by the hand, and we're going to see this later on in Mark chapter 9 verse 25. Back in Mark chapter 1 verse 31, when Jesus took Peter's mother-in-law in this very same house, took her by the hand and lifted her up, this same word is used, to take a hold of. So my point here is Jesus' family doesn't think he's crazy.

This is not what the Scripture is telling us. The crowd thinks that he's out of his mind. Here is this chaos.

These people are crowding and flinging. They can't even eat a meal. People are throwing themselves at him.

He's trapped in the house. And people say, this fellow is out of his mind to put up with this. This is a three-wing circus going on here.

He is possessed of a demon. Beelzebub is empowering him. This news has drifted down to Nazareth, where his family is, and they've come up to take a hold of him.

But they're on his side. They're not coming to drag him away. They don't think he's crazy.

But they love him. They care for him. And they have come up to be with him, to take a hold of him, and to help rescue him from this terrible situation.

So the coming up of his family is motivated by love. They care about him. They're not his enemies.

They're not trying to arrest him. They're not trying to discredit him. But they hear that these things are going on, and it's unheard of.

Nothing like this has ever happened in Israel. So they have come up to see what they can do to help. Many things are getting unmanageable.

It's out of control, and he needs to be removed for a while. So now look at verse 22. The second thing that they heard is that the scribes who came down from Jerusalem say he has to be eligible.

And by the ruler of demons, he casts out demons. Jesus knew that the religious leaders were not responding to His message, and that's why He stopped preaching in the synagogues. And now they have come out from the synagogues.

They've come all the way down from Jerusalem. Notice the Bible always says, down from Jerusalem. In the mind of Jews, Jerusalem was the high point in the land.

And that's true both spiritually and physically. Jerusalem is about 2,400 feet above sea level. Hippiurim here is about 600 feet below sea level.

So they have both literally and figuratively come down from Jerusalem. This is quite a long journey. But the ministry of Jesus has become so notorious that even in Jerusalem, people have heard of it, and the religious leaders are coming up here to check it out and try to discredit Him.

And so they are spreading this lie, this rumor that, well, He's doing this in the power of Satan. So the crowds are saying He's beside Himself. The religious leaders are saying He's satanic.

He's demon-possessed. Now, there are some things that we can draw even from these observations here. First of all, the fact that a crowd has gathered is not always a good thing.

The fact that a crowd has gathered in Jesus' name doesn't necessarily mean that God approves that this is a wonderful, good thing. A crowd gathered in the name of Jesus may or may not know Him. This crowd has gathered because of Jesus, but they've gathered for the wrong reason, haven't they? They have a selfish motive.

They don't recognize Him as God's Son. They don't recognize Him as the Messiah. They recognize Him as someone who can do something for them.

He can heal me. He can entertain me. He's exciting.

It's stimulating to come down and see what new thing He will do today. But there's no recognition in this crowd of who He really is. There's no reverence.

There's no respect. So the fact that a crowd has gathered in His name isn't necessarily a good thing. We have to look at why is that crowd there.

Now that has application for us as believers, as a church. We can assemble a crowd in the name of the Lord, but why are we really here? Are we here because we look at God as a genie and if we rub the lamp the right way, we'll get our wish? Do we look at Him as a great exceldrin pill or a great band-aid that will somehow solve our problems? Is that why we're here? Are we here out of a selfish motive? Are we here because we're looking for an answer? We're looking for a good luck charm. We're looking for something to help us out of our immediate problem.

The difficulty with that motivation is when the problem disappears, so does the motivation. Now that my life is back to a comfortable level of happiness, now that I have a level of comfort where I'm not in pain, I don't really need the Lord anymore. That's not a good motivation to assemble.

Hopefully, when we gather in the name of the Lord, we gather to recognize Him for who He is, to recognize His sovereignty in our life even when things are going well, that He is the Lord of our life because He has bought us with His own blood. So a crowd gathered in the name of Jesus may or may not know Him for who He is. Secondly, a crowd gathered in the name of Jesus may hinder the Lord's work instead of helping Him.

You recall when He's down at the seashore and the crowd around Him, He can't teach, He can't heal because people have squashed Him right up against the water's edge and He has to get into a boat. The crowd is hindering rather than helping. Here, they're confined inside the house and they can't even feed a meal.

The crowd is hindering rather than helping. Jesus can't teach and can't function effectively in this kind of environment. And we'll see that He will not stay here for very long.

So a crowd gathered in the name of Jesus may help the Lord's work or may hinder it. Why are they there? What is their attitude toward Jesus? That's what counts. The mere presence of a crowd is no guarantee that that crowd is pleasing in God's sight.

Thirdly, a crowd is probably not the most reliable source of information. This crowd are saying He's out of His mind, He's beside Himself, He's very unusual. This same phrase was used over in Acts.

You remember Simon the sorcerer? He was going around trying to duplicate the works of the disciples and it says he astonished the people. He put them into a state of confusion, into a state of disarray. It's the very same phrase.

What Simon the sorcerer did to that crowd, this crowd is saying has been done to Jesus. He's randomized. He's not organized.

He doesn't know what he's doing. Fourth, we need to study the Bible carefully before we draw conclusions which may be in error. And this relates specifically to the conclusion that the scribes have drawn.

Who are the scribes? What are they called scribes? They are the keepers of the law. They're the copyists for the Word of God. They teach it.

They preserve it. They're the experts in the law. If there's anyone that should have been able to identify Jesus Christ, it's the scribes.

Yet the scribes come down from Jerusalem and misidentify the Lord. They say He has a demon. He's casting out demons by the prince of demons.

They have a lot of credibility. They're the religious leaders. They're looked up to.

They're respected. Their opinion counts for a lot. And this story is spread very widely in Israel.

We need to be careful when we evaluate other believers. We need to be careful when we evaluate ministries, when we evaluate individuals. We need to be sure that the basic tradition is grounded in the Word of God, that we don't shoot the hip.

We don't judge somebody by our expectations, by our traditions, our presuppositions. We might be wrong. The scribes here were very wrong, and they were supposedly the experts in the Word of God.

So we need to be sure that we have a solid biblical basis for any criticisms that we offer of our fellow believers. I think criticism in general should be rare, particularly public criticism of other believers. We have our hands full criticizing ourselves, knowing.

There's plenty of grist for the mill right in our own souls and in our own lives. And to stand up and

attempt to discredit, to criticize, to find fault, even when we do that in our own minds, we need to be sure that it's on a biblical basis and we need to be very careful about standing up and saying bad things about specific individuals. So these scribes in verse 22 come down from Jerusalem and say He has Beelzebul by the ruler of demons.

He casts out demons. So He called them to Himself. Jesus calls these scribes to Him.

He's going to address them directly. And this is the second part of our passage here, His answer to this accusation. He says, How can Satan cast out Satan? What sense does this make that Satan has sent his demons out here to create disease, to create confusion, to imprison and to incapacitate these people of Israel, and now Satan is going to come back and release them? If you think about this for a minute, there could be a reason why Satan might do that.

We know that in the future when Antichrist comes, he's going to perform lying signs and wonders, isn't he? He's going to create a wound and then heal it. He's going to produce false signs and false wonders. So there is an answer to this question.

How can Satan cast out Satan? Why would Satan be divided against himself? If the purpose of these signs and these miracles is to deceive the people, to promote Jesus Christ as perhaps a political figure, if Jesus is charging money, if Jesus is leading the people away from God, if Jesus is accomplishing the work of Satan, in other words. Satan is a liar. He's a deceiver.

He would like nothing better than to get people away from their God. If that's what Jesus is doing, I think this would make sense. A demon could come and cripple Jesus, could come and cast Him out, and they would say, see, I have credibility.

Now let me tell you what to do. Don't follow your God. The history of humanity is replete with lying signs and wonders.

There is a time when Satan does this. Satan tries to lead people astray. Why is this criticism invalid? The answer is obvious.

Jesus is not leading people away from God. He's leading them toward God. His is a ministry of truth.

I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father but by Me. So these wonders are not accomplishing some personal agenda, some political agenda, or some religious subversion that's going to take the Israelites away from their God.

And because of that, this argument cannot stand. Satan cannot be casting out Satan when it is drawing people to God. Satan can't be divided against himself when the truth is being preached and God, the God of Israel, is being revealed.

That argument doesn't wash. And the very fact that they bring this argument up tells us that they

don't see the truth. They don't see that Jesus is leading them to the Father, and that's why this argument makes sense to them.

They think He's false. He's trying to take us away from the true God, when in fact Jesus is the very revelation and embodiment of God. So, Jesus points out the logical flaw in this argument.

Satan is not working against himself. A house divided against itself cannot stand. If Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he can't stand but has an end.

And obviously, Satan does not have an end. Every day there are new demon-possessed people. Every day there are new challenges and new deceptions.

And the work of Satan goes forward. And Jesus in verse 28 says, Assuredly I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men in whatever blasphemies they may utter. But he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation.

Why does Jesus bring this up here? We have two sides of the same coin, which is the power by which Jesus works. No one disputes the fact that Jesus is casting out demons. The scribes acknowledge it.

They say, He's casting out demons. He's just doing it in Satan's power. So there's no question.

Demons are being cast out. People are being healed. That's the reason for these huge crowds.

But by what power? If it isn't by Satan, then it can only be by the power of God. Specifically by the power of God, the Holy Spirit. These people are denying the power of the Holy Spirit.

They're saying that this work that the Holy Spirit is doing is the work of the devil. For that reason, a lot of folks have looked at this passage and said, well, this is what the unforgivable sin is. If you were alive during the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ and you attributed His miracles to the devil, that was an unforgivable sin.

And once Jesus left the earth, nobody can really commit this sin today because this only took place during Jesus' earthly ministry. Let me ask you something. What about a scribe in Jerusalem who never made the trip to Capernaum? He heard these works of Jesus Christ and sitting down there in Jerusalem, he said that work is the work of the devil.

He's casting out demons by the Prince of Demons. And he never saw Jesus Christ, but he hears about it and he draws this conclusion during the lifetime of Jesus Christ. He would fall under this category, wouldn't he? Now, what about somebody 50 years after Christ that hears about what Jesus did and makes that same claim? What's the difference about whether or not He lived during the time of Christ? If someone hears about the work of Christ and attributes it to the devil, they've basically committed the very same act, haven't they? So I have a little difficulty with that interpretation because the vast majority of people that have heard of the work of Christ weren't

there during His lifetime, but many of them have drawn that very same conclusion.

He's not the Son of God. He doesn't do works by the power of God. The key to understanding this passage and the key to understanding the unforgivable sin is to understand the work of the Holy Spirit.

What is it that the Holy Spirit does? Remember our Scripture reading from last week? In case you didn't, I have it here with me. It came from John 14, 15, 16, where Jesus Himself told us what the Holy Spirit is here to do. You may remember, He says in John 16, 12-14, I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.

However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth. He will guide you into all truth. Who remembers John 14, 6? I am the way, the truth, and the life.

No man comes to the Father but by Me. The Holy Spirit leads us into all truth. What is all truth? Jesus Christ is all truth.

He went on to say, He will not speak. The Holy Spirit will not speak on His own authority. Whatever He hears, He will speak.

He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. That's very clear, isn't it? The mission of the Holy Spirit is to reveal Christ.

That's His job. That's His function. That's what He does.

He leads us into that truth. He does that at the point of salvation. When the Holy Spirit comes, He will convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment.

And then Jesus explains each one of those. The Holy Spirit will convict the world of sin. Why? Because they believe not on Me.

Jesus Christ is the issue in convicting of sin. When the Holy Spirit comes, He will convict of righteousness. Why? Because Jesus Christ is going to the Father.

The perfect standard of righteousness is not present with us where we can see Him. So the Holy Spirit is going to convince the world of righteousness. He's going to reveal the righteousness of Jesus Christ in Christ's absence.

Christ is the issue in sin. Christ is the issue in righteousness. What's the third thing? He will convince the world of judgment.

Why? Because the ruler of this world stands condemned. Jesus Christ accomplished the victory on the cross that defeats Satan, that finishes and completes His sentence of condemnation. Jesus Christ is the issue in sin, in righteousness, and in judgment.

The Holy Spirit reveals Jesus Christ. With that clear in our minds, as we come back to this passage, these people are looking at the works that Jesus Christ performs, His miracles, His casting out of demons. What are those works designed to do? Look over in John.

John tells us, John records the words of Jesus Christ as to what these works are supposed to do. John 5, verse 36. I have a greater witness than John's, Jesus says in talking about John the Baptist.

He says, I have a greater witness than John's, for the works which the Father has given me to finish, the very works that I do, bear witness of me that the Father has sent me. The works that Jesus did identified Him as the Savior, identified Him as God's Son, identified Him as the Messiah. God the Holy Spirit is consistent.

He's doing His job. He's revealing Jesus Christ by empowering the humanity of Christ to do these works. The healing, the casting out of demons are done in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit reveals Jesus Christ as the truth, as the way, as the life, as the path to God the Father. So now, if someone speaks against those works, they're speaking against the Holy Spirit. And what is the Holy Spirit's job to reveal Jesus Christ? To speak against the Holy Spirit is to reject His message, to reject His function.

He has revealed the truth of Christ and we reject it. We say, Holy Spirit, you're lying. Holy Spirit, you're not legitimate.

Your work is not valid. And that is tantamount to saying Jesus Christ is not who you say He is, Holy Spirit. You're convincing in my heart of sin, righteousness, and judgment.

I reject that message. I don't accept what you're saying. That is blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, rejecting His message.

Because that is the face that the Holy Spirit presents us. He doesn't speak for Himself. He doesn't have His own agenda.

He doesn't have His own private mission in life. He is here to reveal Jesus Christ. And to speak against the Holy Spirit is to reject the Holy Spirit's message.

What is the result of rejecting Jesus Christ? Rejecting the message that the Holy Spirit is here to reveal. Eternal condemnation. There is no forgiveness of sins when that message has been rejected.

So this is not a mystical, weird kind of a strange sin that if you say the wrong thing about the works of Christ, you're somehow subject to an eternal sin. This is the same thing that we have understood all along. Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life.

What does John 1.12 tell us? Do you remember? I'm sorry, not John 1.12. That's a good verse. But Ephesians 1.12 talks about forgiveness of sin. Do you remember that verse? Ephesians 1.12 tells us that in Whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace.

Forgiveness of sin comes through Jesus Christ. What does it say here in Mark 3.28? All sins will be forgiven the sons of men in whatever blasphemies they utter. All sins will be forgiven.

What's the basis of that forgiveness? It's the work of Christ. We have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. That's what the basis of this all-forgiveness is.

But he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness. And why is that? Because in rejecting the message of the Holy Spirit, we've rejected forgiveness of sins. We've rejected the work of Christ.

This blasphemy of the Holy Spirit happens every time an unbeliever rejects the Gospel and dies without ever accepting Christ. Goes through life rejecting that witness in his own soul from the Holy Spirit. God has put the knowledge of Himself in the heart of every man.

Romans 1 tells us God has revealed Himself through nature. What may be known of God is visible in His works of creation. And God the Holy Spirit convicts everyone of sin, righteousness, and judgment.

To reject that witness of the Holy Spirit is to reject forgiveness. And that's unforgivable. There is no more forgiveness for sin if we reject that only way, that only truth, and that only life.

And these scribes, by coming down and saying Jesus Christ is not who God the Holy Spirit declares Him to be by these works, they're rejecting the witness of the Old Testament that predicted these things. If you look again in the Gospel of John, it talks about the fact that these works in that same chapter, in John 5, it talks about the fact that these works were known. They were predicted.

These works identify Jesus as the Messiah. And because Jesus does these works, God the Holy Spirit bears witness of who He is. They're rejecting it.

They're saying, no, He's from Satan. And they're lost. They're under eternal condemnation.

It's an unforgivable sin. So the short definition of the unforgivable sin is rejection of Jesus Christ. That's what constitutes blasphemy of the Holy Spirit.

What other way can you blaspheme except to reject what the Holy Spirit is saying because that's His mission in life, to reveal the truth? He reveals it to unbelievers for salvation, and He reveals it to us for our daily lives. So we see here that the miracles that Jesus does, especially the healing of disease by casting out its source, was foretold in Scripture. 2 Thessalonians 2.12 points out

that only those who love the truth can discern the spirit of truth from the spirit of error.

How do we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error? We have to be those that are seeking God. We have to be responsive to the truth. If we reject that truth, we can't tell the difference between a spirit of truth and a spirit of error.

This is where the scribes are. Here's the spirit of truth and they think He's the spirit of error. And they see the demons and the spirits of error and see them as spirits of truth.

They're following exactly the wrong path. The implication of Jesus' ministry is not that He is from Satan, but that He is greater than Satan and has overcome him. Remember in 1 John, greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world.

Let's turn to that passage as we close. 1 John 4. In 1 John 4, we find a description of this very same truth, but rather than being in story form, it is in epistle form. 1 John 4, Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits whether they are of God.

Because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God. Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God.

This is the witness of God, the Holy Spirit. That's what He does. You know it's the Holy Spirit if He's witnessing about Jesus Christ.

Telling the truth about Christ because that's His job. Every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. This is the Spirit of the Antichrist which you have heard was coming and is now already in the world.

You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, overcome these false prophets, overcome these lying spirits, because greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world. They are of the world, therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them. We are of God.

He who knows God hears us. He who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the Spirit of error.

Rejecting the message of the Spirit of truth is unforgivable because it's rejection of Jesus Christ. And it happens today. It happens every day.

People die without Christ every single day. God the Holy Spirit is the witness. And this brings us to a logical conclusion.

If God the Holy Spirit is active in our lives, He's not here as an end in itself to be a problem solver, to be a miracle worker, to produce great entertaining manifestations. He's here to witness to Jesus Christ. That's why we have the Spirit.

If the Holy Spirit is within us, He's active within us, He's influencing us, we will be witnesses of Jesus Christ. So it becomes very important for us to understand the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and that's what we're going to look at next Sunday. We're going to look in detail at the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives as believers, so that we can know how to make sure that that's happening and that we are fulfilling our purpose in this life.

But for now, let's close in a word of prayer. Father, we thank You for the message contained in Your Word. We thank You for the witness of Your Spirit that tells us the truth, that reveals Jesus Christ and makes Him real as a person.

We know that that's the unique thing about Christianity is that it's not just a philosophy, it's not just a system of ideas, it's not some impersonal code of conduct. It's a relationship through Your dear Son who came and expressed love for us by giving Himself on our behalf. Systems of philosophy and systems of ideas don't express love.

They don't have emotions. They don't have care. They don't express themselves as an individual.

But as our God, You have expressed Yourself toward us in the person of Jesus Christ, and it's our goal to come to know Him better. And we pray that the things that we've looked at this morning will help us to do that, to come to know Jesus Christ as the person that He is, and that His influence in our lives through God the Holy Spirit will make us witnesses of His glory. We ask these things in Jesus' name.