

JESUS REJECTED

Matthew 12:22-37; Mark 3:19-30 / Yeshua §62

How many of us have ever worried that we have committed the unpardonable sin?

Jesus said,

MATTHEW 12:31-32 (ESV)

Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

Jesus taught there is a sin, *blaspheming the Holy Spirit*, that is unforgivable. Perhaps you have worried that you have committed the unpardonable sin. Many Christians have.

William Cowper, was one of the great hymn writers of the eighteenth century. He wrote:

*There is a fountain filled with blood,
Drawn from Immanuel's veins,
And sinners plunged beneath that flood
Lose all their guilty stains.*

Yet Cowper was so overcome with depression he tried to kill himself. He became so convinced he had committed an unpardonable sin he stopped attending church for the rest of his life.

For 2000 years this passage has troubled the church. It is a tragic example of interpreting a passage without regard to its context. When studied in context we will discover this was a specific sin committed in a special set of circumstances.

The exorcism of a mute demon was the occasion that prompted Jesus' pronouncement of the unpardonable sin. This took place in Capernaum following the Sermon on the Mount in which Jesus forcefully rejected Pharisaism.

JESUS PERFORMED THE MESSIANIC SIGN OF EXORCISM

MATTHEW 12:22 (ESV)

Then a demon-oppressed man who was blind and mute was brought to him, and he healed him, so that the man spoke and saw.

The demon made the man blind and mute. Jesus healed the man (by casting out the demon) and restored both his sight and speech.

Casting out demons was not unusual at this time. Jewish rabbis practiced exorcism using a three-step strategy:

1. Communicate with the demon who would speak through the possessed person.

Part 1.	The Coming of the King
Part 2.	The Authentication of the King
Part 3.	The Controversy over the King → Jesus Rejected
Part 4.	The Training of the Twelve by the King
Part 5.	The Opposition to the King:
Part 6.	The Preparation of the Disciples by the King
Part 7.	The Official Presentation of the King
Part 8.	The Preparation for the Death of the King
Part 9.	The Trial of the King:
Part 10.	The Death of the King
Part 11.	The Resurrection and the Ascension of the King
Part 12.	The Sequels

2. Discover the demon's name.
3. Using the demon's name, order it to leave its host.

Jesus cast out hundreds of demons. This exorcism was different because the demon was mute; it was impossible to learn its name. Jewish exorcists could not cast out mute demons. The only one, according to their teachings, who could cast out a mute demon is the Messiah.

Pharisaic Judaism taught there were three miracles only the Messiah could accomplish:

1. Healing a Jewish leper.
2. Casting out a mute demon.
3. Healing a man born blind.

Casting out this mute demon was the second messianic miracle Jesus had performed. Jesus had previously healed a Jewish leper (Luke 5:12-16). The crowds seemed to understand the messianic significance of this exorcism because they "were amazed".

MATTHEW 12:23 (ESV)

And all the people were amazed, and said, "Can this be the Son of David?"

The title *Son of David* goes back to the prophecy of Nathan that one of David's sons would one day be made king forever (2 Sam. 7:12-13). By the first century the title referred to the Messiah King.

The crowd asked, "Can this be the Son of David?"

The crowd should have been convinced Jesus was the Messiah. They should have been saying, "Jesus is the Messiah!" The ESV makes their question sound more positive than it was. The Greek text makes it clear their response was less than positive. What they really said was:

"This man cannot be the Son of David, can he?"

Their question anticipated a negative answer.

Even after the many miracles and signs authenticating Jesus' claim to be the Messiah, the crowds still refused to believe. Even after witnessing a messianic miracle, the crowds refused to believe.

The Gospel of Mark tells us a delegation of Pharisees had come down from Jerusalem and were in Capernaum on this occasion (Mark 3:22).

MARK 3:22 (ESV)

And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "by the prince of demons he casts out the demons."

Scribes were Pharisees who had memorized the Oral Law. These scribes were likely representatives of the Great Sanhedrin. Having concluded Jesus is not the Messiah, the Great Sanhedrin may have sent these scribes to Capernaum to actively oppose Jesus.

Having witnessed the exorcism of the mute demon, the crowds asked the scribes and Pharisees, "This man cannot be the Son of David, can he?"

Matthew records the Pharisees' answer in verse 24.

THE PHARISEES' DECLARE JESUS DEMON POSSESSED

MATTHEW 12:24 (ESV)

But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons."

The Pharisees should have been convinced Jesus is the Messiah. They could not deny His miracle but they attribute it to the power of a demon. Actually, they attribute the power to Satan.

The name Beelzebul was the name of a false god worshiped by the Philistines. The name means something like, "Lord of the Dwelling," or "Lord of the High Place." In Jesus' day it was a name for Satan (v.26). The Pharisees' accused Jesus of being in league with Satan.

This charge recorded in Matthew 12:24 is even recorded in the Talmud – the written form of the Oral Law. There are two passages that mention this: one passage claims Jesus had to be killed on the Passover because He seduced Israel by practicing sorcery and the other passage claims Jesus had special powers because He had the name of God cut into His arm. Neither passage denies Jesus did miracles, but in both they claim the miracles were accomplished through demon possession.

In verses 25-29 Jesus defends Himself against the Pharisees' accusation.

JESUS' RESPONSE

Jesus Defends Himself

MATTHEW 12:25-29 (ESV)

²⁵ Knowing their thoughts, he said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. ²⁶ And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? ²⁷ And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. ²⁸ But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. ²⁹ Or how can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house.

In His defense, Jesus made four points:

(vv. 25-26) "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?"

1. If Jesus is casting out Satan's servants (demons) by Satan's power, then Satan is tearing his own kingdom apart.

(v. 27) And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges.

2. If Jesus is empowered by Satan, does that mean their exorcists are empowered by Satan? The Pharisees would insist their exorcists were empowered by God. How, then, can they deny this about Jesus? Particularly after Jesus has pointed out the absurdity of Satan casting out Satan?

(v. 28) But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

3. Casting out demons is an authenticating sign He is the Messiah King and the Kingdom is near. Wherever the King is, there, also, is the kingdom.

(v. 29) Or how can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house.

4. To cast out a demon, one must be stronger than the demon and its master. By casting out demons, Jesus demonstrated He is stronger than Satan; not subservient to Satan.

In verse 30 Jesus moves from defending Himself to pronouncing judgment.

Jesus Pronounces Judgment

MATTHEW 12:30-32 (ESV)

30 Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.

I believe with this statement Jesus signaled a change in His ministry. For a year and a half, He has given the people and their spiritual leaders time to make up their minds. They had John the Baptizers' testimony, God's testimony at Jesus' baptism and the testimony of innumerable signs and wonders proving Jesus is the Messiah. They've had plenty of time to investigate, discuss and debate. Time is up for that generation. The time for agnosticism is over. Indecision is unbelief. There is no neutral ground.

They made their decision by accepting the scribes' and Pharisees' explanation Jesus was empowered by Satan.

They are not with Jesus.

Therefore, they are against Jesus.

They are not gathering others into Jesus' "fold".

Therefore they are "scattering" fellow Jews away from the truth.

That generation's refusal to believe constituted active opposition to Jesus.

That generation's refusal to believe brought upon them a unique judgment.

31 Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. 32 And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

Jesus states *blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven*. What is blasphemy? Blasphemy is slander. To blaspheme God is to slander God, to affirm of Him things that are not true. For example, if we were to say God is not all-knowing, we would be blaspheming Him. Here, the sin that will not be forgiven is the blasphemy of the Holy

Spirit. They have committed this sin. In what way had the scribes, Pharisees and crowds blasphemed the Holy Spirit?

They attributed the power working through Jesus to Satan and not the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was working through Jesus to authenticate His claim to be the Messiah. It was the Holy Spirit Who empowered Jesus to heal the demon possessed man. They said it was Satan. They blasphemed the Holy Spirit and rejected the Spirit's witness to the messiahship of Jesus.

Why was it forgivable to speak against the Son of Man but unforgivable to speak against the Holy Spirit? The answer may be in the title by which Jesus referred to Himself: the *Son of Man*. *Son of Man* refers to Jesus' humanity – His incarnation. As the Apostle Paul wrote, when Jesus came to earth He emptied Himself of His heavenly glory:

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-8 (ESV)

5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

There was nothing in Jesus' human *form* that caused people to wonder if He was the Messiah. He looked like an ordinary first century Jewish man. Doubting Jesus' claims based on His unremarkable human form was probably common, but thankfully forgivable. Isaiah 53:2 predicted this situation:

ISAIAH 53:2 (ESV)

For he grew up before him like a young plant,
and like a root out of dry ground;
he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,
and no beauty that we should desire him.

To reject Jesus because of his unremarkable outward form was wrong, but it was forgivable. A Jew in that generation could repent of speaking against Jesus in that way and be forgiven.

But it was not the same with the Holy Spirit. It was clear to anyone with an honest heart and mind that it was the Spirit of God working through Jesus to heal and to cast out demons. To say otherwise was to blaspheme the Spirit.

Why was this unforgivable?

I think it was unforgivable in that God chose not to forgive it. The opponents of Jesus had crossed a line with God. In His great patience, God had given the nation a year and a half of overwhelming evidence proving Jesus is the Messiah and still they refused. Their hardness of heart was inexcusable and their blaspheming of the Holy Spirit insulting. They crossed the line and God will not release them from the consequence of their sin. They will not enter the kingdom of God.

This passage is one of the most important in all the Gospels. It is the official rejection of Jesus by the nation of Israel as led by her spiritual leaders, the Pharisees. It is the turning point in Jesus' ministry.

To summarize this passage, Jesus came to this first century generation of Jews claiming to be their Messiah and offering them the kingdom. For a year and a half, the Holy Spirit empowered Jesus to do signs and wonders, healings and exorcisms authenticating His messianic claim. In the end, the nation followed their spiritual leaders, the Pharisees in rejecting Jesus. They accepted the explanation of the Pharisees that Jesus was empowered, not by the Holy Spirit of God, but by Satan. In so doing, they officially rejected Jesus and committed the unpardonable sin, the blaspheming of the Holy Spirit.

Can we commit this unpardonable sin found here in Matthew 12?

It is my conviction we cannot. This sin is very specific and it is tied to very specific conditions. Jesus must be physically present and performing miracles. Blaspheming the Holy Spirit is attributing the power at work through Jesus to Satan and not the Holy Spirit. Jesus' physical presence and unremarkable form seems to explain how blaspheming the *Son of Man* is forgivable while blaspheming the Holy Spirit is not. In context, this was a sin only the scribes, Pharisees and crowds could commit in response to the authenticating work of the Holy Spirit through Jesus.

Further evidence may also be in the observation that this is the only time Jesus speaks of the unpardonable sin. The apostles never speak of the unpardonable sin anywhere in the New Testament.

Having said that, we must not lose sight that this was a tragic moment in history. This marks the turning point of Jesus' ministry – no longer will He offer the kingdom to Israel. This episode seals the fate of the Jewish nation for the next 2000 years – 2000 years of tremendous suffering that could have been avoided if they had believed.