

Negative Responses to Jesus, Part 5: Blasphemy

Matthew 12:22-37

Halifax: 31 July 2005

Introduction:

Today we continue our series in Matthew's gospel.

- At the present time, we are looking at the negative responses to Jesus that are recorded for us in Matthew 11-12.
 - It is a sad commentary on the condition of the human heart to see how shamefully Jesus was treated when He came into the world to redeem us.
 - Already we have seen the responses of doubt, criticism, indifference, and rejection;
 - and today we come to worst response of all to our Lord...
 - Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit!
 - This sin occurs when God's Spirit opens the eyes of a sinner to see the glory of Jesus Christ and His work...
 - and that sinner maliciously sets himself against Christ,
 - even declaring that His work is the work of the Devil when he knows good and well that it is the very work of God!
 - This is the most diabolical of all sins, and the only one for which the Bible declares there to be no forgiveness.
 - In Matthew 12:22-37, Jesus confronts this sin head on...
 - And in this confrontation, there is much for you to learn...
 - It is recorded for you...
 - that you might flee from this most monstrous of sins...
 - and set your course in the very opposite direction...
 - so that rather than resisting God's gracious work you might heartily embrace it...
 - and rather than opposing the Lord, you might fully trust Him forever and learn to speak well of Him.

TRANS> Now I am sure that many of you have questions about this unpardonable sin!

- And so I want to begin this morning by showing you just what it is.

I. You blaspheme the Holy Spirit when you maliciously and decidedly call what you know to be God's redemptive work the work of Satan.

- A. This is what the Pharisees did (or at least were very near to doing) in Matthew 12
1. Jesus had performed a marvellous work among them, showing that He was the Messiah.
 - a. We are not given a great many details—
 - Just told in verse 22 that:
 - Matt 12:22: Then one was brought to Him who was demon-possessed, blind and mute; and He healed him, so that the blind and mute man both spoke and saw.
 - In this case, the man's condition was not the result of genetic defect, sickness, or injury...
 - It was the result of demon possession—
 - Which, as I have shown you before, was a thing that became much more common during the time of Jesus.
 - It is hardly mentioned in the Old Testament, but Jesus encounters it quite frequently in the New.
 - b. Consider the miserable condition of this man...
 - 1) He was under the torment of the Devil...
 - was unable to see in order that he might help himself...
 - and unable to speak that he might ask the help of others
 - 2) As Jesus' miracles of physical healings are given to set forth to us the spiritual deliverance He came to bring,
 - This man is a clear picture of every fallen man under the spiritual dominion of Satan...
 - His eyes are shut so that He cannot see the truth of God...
 - And His mouth is shut so that He cannot pray for the mercy of God...
 - He is miserable until Jesus comes to save Him!
 - c. And you see that Jesus does come to save him—
 - and that the deliverance is a complete deliverance—
 - The demon is gone, the man can see, and the man can speak!
 - Here is a clear testimony that Jesus is the Messiah who has come to deliver us from the power of the Devil...
 - to take away our blindness and our dumbness that we might be filled with the light of God and the praises of God.

2. The people were utterly amazed!
 - a. The word *amazed* means “thrown out of place...”
 - They were out of the minds with amazement.
 - This, of course, is the natural effect when a person sees the supernatural redemptive power of God breaking into our world!
 - Even after many other miracles, each new one brings fresh wonderment!
 - b. In response to what they see, the multitudes asked the question:
 - “Could this be the Son of David?”
 - 1) The title, “Son of David,” was another name for the Messiah or the Christ—
 - the one that God had promised to send to redeem His people.
 - to deliver them from their bondage to sin and death.
 - 2) The form of the question is that which expresses doubt.
 - These multitudes are not ready to declare that Jesus is surely the Son of David,
 - He does not fit the image they had of the Messiah as one coming in great honour and circumstance with armies and royal attendants and palaces...
 - But there is no question that He has just performed another amazing miracle!
 - It seems pretty obvious that He is the Son of David, but they are not ready to admit it!
 - 3) Now it is a sad thing to see the hesitation of the multitude to what is obvious...
 - It almost seems that they are waiting for an argument...
 - Often the multitudes are like that—
 - They can’t furnish a satisfactory argument to refute what the facts seem to testify...
 - So they wait for their religious or political or academic leaders to furnish them with an argument...
 - This is the same thing we see today—
 - when someone like Darwin comes up with a foolish theory of origins that denies God—

- a theory for which there is absolutely no evidence and a theory that still leaves unanswered the question of origins...
 - and millions and millions of people latch on to it as truth!
 - They are eager for an argument to keep them from having to face the truth!
3. And so after Jesus cast the demon out of the blind and mute man, the Pharisees provide the multitude with a foolish argument...
- a. The Pharisees simply could not bear to see Christ honoured on account of this miracle!
 - Mark tells us that it was a little group of scribes that had come down from Jerusalem to observe Jesus.
 - b. While they would have liked to deny that a miracle had been done, that was impossible...
 - If the man was not known to the multitude (which he probably was), he was at least known to those that brought him...
 - They could not say that it was staged...
 - There was no mistake that Jesus had accomplished a great miracle by supernatural power...
 - so it is was not possible for them to deny the miracle.
 - c. But their answer was ready!
 - They say:
 - vs. 24: “This *fellow*... (they speak with contempt—the word *fellow* is not even in the original... they just call Jesus “this”)
 - “**This** does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons.”
 - That is their solution...
 - Jesus must have done this by the power of Beelzebub—one of many names that was sometimes used to refer to Satan.

B. Jesus uses several arguments to show how absolutely absurd this charge was!

- 1. First, He shows that the charge is absurd because the whole scope and tenor of His ministry was contra-Satan.
 - Matthew 12:25:26 says:
 - But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them: “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will

not stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?”

- a. To even suggest that Jesus was teamed up with Satan to perform an exorcism would be to suppose that Satan was attacking himself!
 - 1) Of course it is true that Satan often appears as an angel of light and works deceptive signs and wonders—
 - but to say that Jesus was working in league with Satan when the whole tenor of Jesus’ ministry was completely antithetical to Satan...
 - was absolutely ridiculous!
 - 2) Jesus had never done one thing to indicate that He was a false prophet...
 - a) Now the prophets were, according to scripture, put to rigorous tests...
 - but Jesus clearly passed them all!
 - He had done many signs and they had all come true... and He had done greater signs than any before Him...
 - He had preached no false doctrine...
 - His life was such that no fault could be found with Him.
 - b) To charge Him as one working with the Devil was nothing but a desperate attempt to discredit Him!
 - Surely the Pharisees themselves did not even believe it!
 - They wanted to believe it, but surely they knew better!
- b. Now I want you to understand that whatever the case,
 - the ones who committed blasphemy against the Spirit were the ones who knew for certain that Jesus was performing God’s redemptive work...
 - and deliberately opposed Him out of malice and spite...
 - We are not talking about the multitudes who did not know what to think,
 - or even the Pharisees that might have latched onto this argument, but without being convinced in their conscience that Jesus really was the Messiah...
 - Blasphemy against the Spirit occurs only when a person knowingly sets out to oppose the saving work of God against his own clear convictions.

TRANS> So Jesus’ first argument is that there is no way that Satan would be aiding Him to do His work since His work clearly involved destroying the works of Satan!

2. Secondly, Jesus argues that the Pharisees are being extremely prejudiced to reject His exorcisms while freely accepting the exorcisms of their own sons.
 - He says:
 - Matthew 12:27: “And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast *them* out? Therefore they shall be your judges.”
 - By speaking of their “sons” He means their disciples.
 - a. You can be sure that the exorcisms the Pharisees disciples performed were not nearly so clear and so powerful as Jesus’ exorcisms were—
 - There is a strong probability that they were not even credible exorcisms, but it is certain that whatever they were,
 - they were not nearly so successful or convincing as Jesus’ were...
 - Nor were the lives of these exorcists comparable to the holiness of Jesus.
 - b. For the Pharisees to accept the questionable exorcisms of their disciples and then charge Jesus with being in league with Beelzebub was ridiculously biased!
 - This is something like the inconsistency you see today among politicians when the politicians in one’s own party can steal and cheat and lie,
 - but the leaders of an opposing party are carefully scrutinised and denounced for even a mere suspicion.

TRANS> That is Jesus second argument against the Pharisees’ charge...

3. Thirdly, Jesus shows them that in claiming that He is in league with Satan, the Pharisees show their blindness...
 - that they have somehow missed the work that God was performing right before their eyes through Jesus...
 - namely—that God was bringing in His glorious redemptive kingdom!
 - a. In verse 28, Jesus says:
 - “But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you.”
 - Jesus shows that if He was doing His work by the power of God’s Spirit, which of course He was...
 - then it was a sure sign that God’s kingdom was here and that He was the promised Messiah!
 - God’s kingdom had come and these leaders could not see it!

- They were completely blind to what was happening right before their very eyes!
- b. Jesus goes on to explain that by the works He was performing,
- It was clear that the strong man was bound!
 - v. 29: “How can one enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods unless he first binds the strong man? Then he will plunder his house.”
 - In this illustration, Jesus uses the strong man to refer to Satan...
 - Up until now, Satan had been given dominion over mankind.
- 1) In the Garden, Adam had placed himself and all his posterity under the dominion of Satan...
- But God promised that He would raise up a redeemer to crush the serpent’s head!
 - And it is clear from Jesus’ ministry that that He was that Redeemer!
- 2) No one else had ever been able to bind Satan, but now the promised Redeemer was here, spoiling His house!
- For anyone to say that Jesus was teamed up with Satan was to completely miss what was going on!

TRANS> And so after Jesus presented these three arguments—

- 1) That Satan would not cast out Himself...
 - 2) That the Pharisees accepted the exorcisms of others far more questionable...
 - 3) And that Jesus’ work displayed clearly that God’s kingdom had come...
 - He drives home the main point that runs through all three arguments:
4. He shows that there is such an antithesis between what He is doing and what Satan does that everyone must take one side or the other!
- a. Jesus work was so counter to Satan that to oppose His work...
- or even to be indifferent about it—
 - was to scatter with Satan...
 - Satan’s whole work is to separate men from God, and Christ’s whole work was to gather men to God and reconcile them with Him.
 - So neutrality is impossible!
 - If you are not joined with Jesus in the work of gathering, you are involved in the work of scattering.

- b. This is especially the case since the world is currently under the dominion of Satan...
- 1) If you do not come to Jesus, if you do not gather to Him, you remain scattered—separated from God.
 - Gathering to God is like rowing upstream...
 - if you do nothing, you will be moved away from him...
 - Or it is like shepherding...
 - If those who watch the sheep do not continually gather them and pull them together, they scatter them...
 - To do nothing is to scatter the flock.
 - 2) To this should be added the fact that the gathering that Jesus does is no trivial gathering!
 - It has vital importance...
 - far more importance than life or death in this world!
 - His gathering is a rescue from eternal condemnation...
 - And a gathering to eternal life in happy communion with God!
 - For someone to be indifferent to man's crisis as alienated from God...
 - And to fail to join with Jesus about something of such importance...
 - is no trivial omission!
 - and to set out to knowingly and deliberately oppose Him is surely a crime of infinite proportions!

TRANS> Now the Pharisees who knew that Jesus was from God and had come to establish God's kingdom and yet opposed Him were **willingly** fighting for the preservation of Satan's kingdom!

- They were deliberately opposing the kingdom of God because of envy and malice!
- They were declaring that what they clearly know to be God's work of redemption was the work of Satan!

II. Jesus declared that there is no forgiveness for the one who does this!

A. This is a dreadful pronouncement that Jesus makes!

1. Look at how final it is!
 - a. In verse 31 and 32 He says:

- “Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy *against* the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the *age* to come.”
- b. Note well that Jesus is not simply saying they will not be forgiven because they will never repent...
- It is true that they won’t repent, for God gives them over to a reprobate mind...
 - But Jesus is saying something more...
 - He is saying that this sin itself is unforgivable!
2. The Bible speaks of this dreadful sin throughout its pages...
- a. In the OT,
- are told that there was no sacrifice for presumptuous sins...
 - When a person deliberately and wilfully chose to renounce God—
 - not by falling into sin—even very serious sin—for a time...
 - but when that falling away was a deliberate renunciation of God and a turning against Him as the evil One...
 - There was no more forgiveness.
- b. In Hebrews 10:26, we read about those who deliberately and decidedly reject the gospel after having fully understood it... It says:
- Heb 10:26-29: For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷ but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. ²⁸ Anyone who has rejected Moses’ law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. ²⁹ Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?
 - Such a person has seen and understood the gospel, has professed it, and then has chosen to renounce it!
 - This is not one whose faith falters in times of persecution, but one who decidedly chooses to renounce the Lord Jesus...
- c. Hebrews 6 speaks of the same situation...
- This says that those who were enlightened by the Spirit, accept the gospel, and then renounce it are without hope:
 - Heb 6:4-6: For *it is* impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit,

and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put *Him* to an open shame.

- This is the sin against the Holy Spirit...
 - The Spirit has shown them the truth and they have seen it and now they have turned against it deliberately.

d. In 1 John 5, this is referred to as the sin unto death.

B. But you must also see that this unpardonable sin is an exception to the rule!

1. For every other sin and blasphemy there is forgiveness for those who repent!

a. The Jews who crucified Jesus were fully pardoned on the day of Pentecost as soon as they repented!

- After they saw that they had crucified the Lord of glory, they did not obstinately think, “indeed we did and we are glad...”
- They were cut to the heart when they saw who He was!
 - They had done it ignorantly and so they said,
 - Men and brethren, what shall we do?
 - And Peter said: “Repent and be baptised and you shall be saved.”
 - He promised them forgiveness even though they had crucified Christ because they did it ignorantly!

b. Paul, who persecuted Christians, was also fully pardoned.

- ¹ Tim 1:12 ¶ And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting *me* into the ministry, ¹³ although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did *it* ignorantly in unbelief. ¹⁴ And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.
- In fact, he is not set up as pattern man-- an example to all of God’s great mercy to the chief of sinners!
 - ¹⁵ This *is* a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. ¹⁶ However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.

c. You can mark it down for certain,

- There has never been a sinner who came to Jesus with genuine repentance that was rejected; and there never will be!
- Jesus says:

- John 6:37: “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.”
2. What is the difference between the sins and blasphemies of Paul and the sin against the Holy Spirit?
- a. The Holy Spirit is the illuminator.
 - To sin against Him is to sin against what you know to be God’s truth!
 - Now every one does that in many ways...
 - Consider the extreme example of David who committed adultery and then murder—knowing good and well that it was wrong...
 - But the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is more than doing what you know is wrong!
 - The Holy Spirit’s chief work, as far as revelation is concerned, is to reveal to us the work that Christ did to reconcile us to us God.
 - Now what the Pharisees in Matthew 12 saw was the beginning of that work of Christ—
 - And among those whom the Spirit had shown that this was the work of redemption that God had promised and who not only rejected it, but also called it the work of Satan—
 - this was to blasphemy against the Holy Spirit!
 - b. And so you see that this blasphemy involves at least two things:
 - 1) To see God’s work of redemption and that it is truly God’s work by the illumination of God’s Spirit.
 - 2) To openly and deliberately assail that work and maliciously attribute that work to Satan.
 - c. The Scriptures make it clear that this is exactly what those who are forgiven did not do.
 - 1) Of the persons in Acts who repented, Peter says,
 - Acts 3:17: “Yet now, brethren, I know that you did *it* in ignorance, as *did* also your rulers.”
 - These are the one’s Jesus prayed for when He said:
 - “Father forgive them for they know not what they do.”
 - There were some who knew exactly what they were doing, and Jesus did not pray for them because for them was no forgiveness.
 - 2) Paul says expressly that he was forgiven because he did it ignorantly and in unbelief.

- He was one of those Jesus spoke about who thought he was serving God when he persecuted the Christians...
- God's Spirit had not revealed the truth about Jesus to him, so he acted ignorantly and in unbelief.

TRANS> So this is a sin against which every covenant person must guard!

- That we who have been illuminated should turn against Christ and the holy gospel and begin to speak blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.
 - This is not something that happens all at once—
 - It is a gradual process...
 - It begins with being indifferent about whether what you say brings glory to God or not.
 - Soon, it progresses to grumbling and complaining—cursing God's works.
 - And that progresses to cursing the very person of God...
 - And then we start to speak even against His mercy until we are calling the very gospel diabolical.

III. So what should we do?

- **To guard against this terrible progression, take heed to what Jesus shows you in verses 33-37.**

A. First of all, realise that what you say is a true reflection of what you are.

1. Jesus shows plainly that your words are a true reflection of your heart.

a. He says, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks."

- Your heart is like a fountain that is filled with all sorts of desires and attitudes and affections and purposes...
 - These are continually flowing out of your mouth in words.

b. And these words show what is truly in your heart... what you are—good or evil.

- In verse 35, Jesus says,
 - "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil things."
- Now are hearts are deceptive and we often don't see all the corruption and sin is really there...
 - If you want to know what is in your heart, then listen to your words!
 - Not when you are at your best, but when you are tired and stressed!

- We are so full of flattery that we like to deny that our words are a true reflection of our hearts...
 - We say something monstrous to our wife or our parents and then we say,
 - “I didn’t really mean it.”
 - But do you know what the real problem is?
 - The real problem is that you **did** mean it.
 - You did not mean to say it, and you know it was wrong to say it, but the words didn’t come from some other fountain...
 - They came out of your heart!
2. Your words are such a reliable reflection of your heart that Jesus Himself will use them to judge you!
- a. He judged the Pharisees by their words of blasphemy and concluded that they were a brood of vipers...
 - They were full of deadly poison...
 - Little groups of vipers going about from place to place to make proselytes.
 - They had come to John’s baptism and now they were following Jesus around to spread the poison and to oppose God’s kingdom, making disciples that were twice as much the children of Hell!
 - Jesus’ judgement of them was severe because of what they said.
 - b. In verse 36 & 37, He says that our words will be used on the last day to justify or to condemn us.
 - 1) He says that we must give an account for every idle word...
 - That is, a word spoken for nothing!
 - a word that is spoken without the purpose of glorifying God...
 - in love to our neighbour and in love to God...
 - with a purpose of honouring Him and serving others.
 - 2) This is where the problem of blasphemy first begins...
 - When you are unconcerned about whether your words glorify God...
 - And soon there are words that are not just idle, but destructive...
 - words of complaining and cursing and bitterness...
 - words that cut your neighbour or oppress him...

- words of slander and gossip.
 - And before you know it, you find yourself speaking against God and His person and work...
 - and ascribing His glorious redemptive work to the devil.
 - Like it or not, what you say is a reflection of what you truly are.
3. This is all very convicting, isn't it?
- a. On the basis of their words, Jesus says to the Pharisees:
 - "How can you being evil speak good things?"
 - b. That is a very good question that I think you all must ask yourselves.
 - When you see that your words are a true reflection of your heart...
 - And when you look at all the things you say in the course of day,
 - you are surely compelled to ask:
 - "How can I, being evil, speak good things?"

B. Jesus tells you what you must do in verse 33!

1. You must change the tree!
 - a. v. 33: Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by *its* fruit.
 - If you make a tree good, the fruit will be good
 - If you make the tree bad, the fruit will be bad.
 - Just as a tree can only bring forth fruit according to its nature...
 - So you can only speak according to your nature!
 - The only solution is to change your heart!
 - b. I believe this is one of those places where our Lord commands us to do something that we can only do by His grace!
 - 1) How can you possibly change your heart?
 - Of course the answer is, you can't!
 - You can no more change your heart than the leopard can change his spots!
 - 2) This is like that place in Isaiah 1 where the Lord commands:

- Isa 1:16: Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, Learn to do good.
 - Or in Jeremiah 4:4 where He says,
 - Jer 4:4: Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, And take away the foreskins of your hearts, You men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, Lest My fury come forth like fire, And burn so that no one can quench *it*, Because of the evil of your doings."
2. How can you do this? How can you make the tree good?
- a. Why does the LORD call us to do what we cannot do?
 - Does He simply wish to torment us?
 - b. By no means!
 - He does this to drive us to look to His promise!
 - Have we not just seen in Jesus discourse that He has come to bring God's gracious kingdom of redemption?
 - Have we not just seen that by casting out Satan, Jesus shows that He is that mighty One God promised that would come to bind the strong man in order that He might take us away from Him and restore us to God?
 - c. Of course that's it!
 - He wants to make you desperate so that you will look to the redemption that He has sent in Jesus!
 - Does He command His people to circumcise their hearts?
 - What else does He say?
 - He says, "I will circumcise your heart!"
 - Does He command you to wash yourselves and make yourselves clean?
 - What does He say?
 - He says, "I will sprinkle clean water upon you and you shall be clean!"
3. And so my friends, here is the great difference between the person who is blessed and the person who is cursed!
- a. It is faith!
 - If you have faith, you believe God's promise.

- Instead of making excuses and blaming God and trying to justify your sin, you own up to it and look to God's redemptive work in Jesus Christ to save you!
 - Rather than cursing that gracious work as an evil thing, you bless God for it and give thanks!
 - You believe that God has sent His Son from heaven to come and bind the strong man...
 - To take back a people for God, and you rejoice and plead with Him to deliver you by His power and grace!
- b. When faith is at the core of your being,
- You bring forth praise and thanks to Jesus Christ rather than cursing and bitterness.
 - His grace works in you by and by so that more and more the cursing and complaining depart...
 - And as you continue in His grace, even the idle words begin to diminish.
- c. But the foundation of your hope is not based upon the changes He has accomplished in you thus far...
- But in His promise of forgiveness and daily renewal.
 - You see that He has come to set you free from the tyranny of Satan, and to cleanse you from all your sin,
 - And so you rejoice in Him and put your hope in Him...
 - What the Pharisees called evil is what you rejoice in.
 - That is the beginning of a new kind of speaking—a heavenly speaking that allows you to rejoice in hope before the judgement of God.
 - By your words, “I believe that Jesus is Lord,” you will be justified and not condemned...
 - For these words mean that you believe Him to be the One who came not to do evil work or ordinary work,
 - but to restore us to God the Father by taking away our sins.
 - The Pharisees says, “He is Beelzebub” and are condemned.
 - You say, “He is Lord” and are justified.