

AUGUST 16, 2020

LESSON 10

MIRACLES OF JESUS

THE BINDING OF SATAN (MATTHEW 12:22-32)

In Matt 12:31, Jesus said that “blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.” What is “blasphemy against the Spirit” that cannot be forgiven? What exactly is this sin?

The Law of Harmony

As we begin, it is vital that we interpret a Bible passage in a way that agrees with the rest of the Bible. Because all of the Bible is inspired by God (2 Tim 3:16), there cannot be conflict between passages. So, if I interpret a passage that conflicts with another part of the Bible, then I’ve got something wrong.

For example, some people read John 3:16 and conclude that all you have to do to be saved is believe in Jesus. However, saying this puts Jesus in conflict with his own words (Matt 28:19). The truth is, belief is a vital part of the process, but only one part. We must take all that Jesus says to get the full picture.

It is this law of agreement that creates some problems for us in this passage. To say that there is some sin so terrible that it cannot be forgiven just doesn’t seem to fit well with the rest of Bible teaching.

Here’s something else that’s confusing in this passage: why can you speak a word against Jesus and be forgiven (v. 32), but not if you speak a word against the Spirit? The Bible nowhere indicates that the Spirit is more important than Jesus or deserving greater respect.

Consider also that, when we say that some sins (or even this one sin) are unforgivable, then we are saying that there is something so terrible, not even the blood of Jesus can cleanse us. Again, this just doesn’t harmonize with scripture (1 John 1:9).

So maybe we missed something here in Matthew 12.

When our interpretation of one passage doesn’t fit with the rest of the Bible, we need to go back and take a closer look. One of the best ways to ensure you understand a passage correctly is to take a look at the larger context. This brings us to our second law of Bible study.

The Law of Context

Every passage has a context. The Bible is not made up of isolated statements. In order to properly understand a passage, we must study it in its context. Each verse is surrounded by other verses, paragraphs, chapters and books—the context. This context often sheds light on a specific verse and helps us understand it better. Let’s observe five important details in Matthew 12 that illuminate its overall context.

“He Casts Out Demons by the Prince of Demons”

And when the demon had been cast out, the mute man spoke. And the crowds marveled, saying, “Never was anything like this seen in Israel.” But the Pharisees said, “He casts out demons by the prince of demons.”

—Matt 9:33–34

The Pharisees accused Jesus of being in league with Satan earlier in the gospel of Matthew. How does this connect with Matt 12:22–32?

1. Just prior to talking about the “unpardonable sin,” Jesus performed a miracle (v. 22). He cast out a demon that was causing a man to be blind and mute.
2. This miracle amazed the crowd. But even more important, it brought them to the very point of belief (v. 23). They were ready to accept Jesus as the Messiah.
3. This response by the crowds troubled the Pharisees. They could not deny that a miracle had taken place; so they had to find some way to discredit it. Without much time to think it through, they threw out an accusation (v. 24). They accuse Jesus of working this miracle by the power of Satan.
4. Jesus points out how ridiculous this charge is (vs. 25–29). If Jesus is using Satan’s power to cast out demons, then Satan is battling against himself. It was a ridiculous charge. The truth was that Jesus worked this miracle by the Spirit of God (v. 28). It demonstrated not that he was in league with the devil, but that he had power over the devil (v. 29).
5. And finally, Jesus’ argument puts the Pharisees in a very difficult position. He was not working with Satan; he was opposing Satan. But think about it: if Jesus was opposing Satan and they were opposing Jesus, who were they in league with (v. 30)?

The Unpardonable Sin

Now, with this context under our belt, I think we can answer those nagging questions about the next two verses (vv. 31–32). First, what is this blasphemy against the Spirit? The answer is, they attributed to Satan what Jesus says is the Spirit’s work. This is the blasphemy. This is how they spoke against the Spirit.

But this still leaves a more difficult question to be answered. Why could they not be forgiven of this sin? It’s because they contributed the power of the Spirit to the work of the devil.

Now that’s a problem for these enemies of Jesus. If the miracles will not convince them, then nothing will. There isn’t anything else that can be offered to bring them to belief. What then will be their fate? They will never be forgiven. They will be lost forever because their hard hearts will not allow them to believe in the Savior sent to rescue them from sin. In other words, they could be forgiven—if they repented of their disbelief in the Holy Spirit’s power.