

## **THE UNPARDONABLE SIN**

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We're going to look at the theme tonight, "The Unpardonable Sin" for our Bible teaching. Mark 3:20-30 "Then Jesus entered a house and again a crowd gathered so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. When his family heard about this they went to take charge of him for they said, 'He is out of his mind.' The teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said 'He is possessed by Beelzebul, by the price of demons he is driving out demons. So Jesus called them and spoke to them in parables. 'How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself that house cannot stand. And if Satan opposes himself and is divided he cannot stand. His end has come. In fact no one can 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. I tell you the truth. All the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them but whoever blasphemies against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven. He is guilty of an eternal sin.' He said this because they were saying, 'He has an unclean spirit.'"

When I think back in my spiritual childhood I can recollect three spiritual fears that I had. It reminds me kind of Luther's four fears. Luther was afraid of certain last things. Death, judgment, hell and heaven. He was afraid of them all. The three things that I feared greatly as a child growing up in the church – one was that I would miss the return of the Lord. I had psychologically convinced myself that if the Lord would time his coming with my doing something wrong and I'd be left behind. And sermons on the Lord's return frightened me spitless, would be the word to describe it. It's neat when you get older and you realize that the doctrine of the Second Coming for Christians was meant to be an encouragement and not a terror. There are many people in the body of Christ who haven't learned that yet. Their whole orientation toward the Lord's coming is fear, doom and gloom. Instead of rightness, hope, joy, the greatest thing in the world to happen to us, the return of the Lord.

The second fear I had was the fear of being possessed by an evil spirit. Anybody else have that fear? I've been in a meeting once or twice where someone indicated they were ready to do an exorcism and everyone should bow their heads because when the demon came out of that person it might enter someone whose heart wasn't right. As a little kid I'd set there....! Of course again, you get older and you realize that that isn't the methodology of Jesus. Jesus never cast out demons and said, When I get rid of this demon he's going to go into somebody else. He'd send them to the abyss. The best Jesus would allow would that it enter some pigs. It would defeat his purpose to cast out a demon in one person and let it flit over to another person. That doesn't make sense. But it did produce some pretty powerful praying in the service.

The third fear that I had was the fear of committing the unpardonable sin. There have been times in my Christian experience before I really understood the scripture on the unpardonable sin that I was convinced that maybe I had. Any of you ever concerned at some time in your life whether you've committed the unpardonable sin?

When we look at a subject like the unpardonable sin it's a serious subject so I don't want at all to make light of a serious subject. But here is where if we take time to find out what the scripture is really saying we get a more powerful meaning from the scripture and we get a right meaning

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rather than causing people to live in the needless bondage of guilt and abject fear we can by properly understanding the word of God give counsel and get help.

So I think I've had a long time fascination with this subject, the unpardonable sin. If you asked any number of people what is the unpardonable sin, you're get some different kinds of responses. If you went out on the street and did a poll and just selected people at random who knew nothing about the scripture and said, What kind of wrong could you do for which there would be no pardon? You might get some answers like "You'd have to do something like Charles Manson. If you murder the people the way he did. He ought never to be pardoned. Or Charles Speck, the Chicago killer." Or people might say, "There are certain kinds of crimes that when you commit them it's really all over." Especially I think of abuses against children, which are particular heinous in their scope. Awful crimes. There are people who would say, Richard Nixon has committed such a crime. He should never be pardoned. This country has had a rough time pardoning and forgiving Richard Nixon. A lot of the secular world has basically attached to former President Nixon the whole thing, which could never be forgiven much less forgotten.

Maybe that would be one idea of what the unpardonable sin was. Somebody has done something that the public regards as so bad that there is simply no way to ever see them again except to see them as having committed that sin. Irreversible.

Perhaps some of us in the body of Christ would regard taking the Lord's name in vain. When a person does this they are treading on thin ice. They are moving toward the commission of the unpardonable sin. I find it extremely offensive to hear the Lord's name used as a curse word. There is an incidence, we looked at it a few weeks ago from Leviticus 24:10-23 where a member of the Israelite community out in the wilderness took God's name in vain. The death penalty was the result. It was a blasphemy against the name. There might be some who feel that to use the name of God as a swear word is to go beyond the possibility of repentance. We'll examine that as we go through the subject.

Some of us who are in a charismatic dimension, or a Pentecostal dimension, have had a great deal of difficulty with some in the body of Christ who have not shared our experience and our doctrinal perspective and have said awful things about the ministry of the Holy Spirit like people who speak in tongues are of the devil. Where do they get the spiritual gifts? Couldn't be from God because those gifts ceased with the apostolic age. The origin must be Satan who's attempting to deceive the church by resurrecting spiritism in the church. Horrible things are said against the Holy Spirit by people who should know the Bible a little bit better. We say, How could anyone who know the Bible so well say such things against the Holy Spirit?

Perhaps a fourth popular way may be of looking at blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is to confuse the unpardonable sin with a guilty conscious. So that a person has done something wrong and has convinced themselves that they indeed have slipped past the day of grace. I have met people like this who have felt that they have committed the unpardonable sin, who said I want to get right with God with all my heart. I would like to serve Christ. But I can't. Because there was a moment when I made my decision. I walked away and I've done that for which I cannot be forgiven. I've spurned the grace of God and there's no hope for me. I would love to be a believer. In fact I believe that Jesus is Lord but I can't appropriate that for myself. I can never be forgiven. I'm outside of God's grace. That would be an understanding of the unpardonable sin that arises out of the guilty conscious.

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In order to kind of look at these popular ideas as compared to what the Bible teaches we'll take some moments to look at the context of the teaching of the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit which is the unpardonable sin, the context of that teaching which is found for us here in the gospel of Mark. In order to look at the context we not only want to look at the verses which we have just read from Mark 3 but we want to look at the total context of the development of the identity of Jesus Christ in the gospel of Mark.

I've got something called the messianic secret. If you study very carefully the gospels you'll find that the idea of Jesus' identity and the revelation of his identity has everything to do with this sin which Jesus talks about, the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Because there is a linkage between perceiving who he is with committing the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. When Jesus begins his ministry he has to do something which is very difficult procedurally to do. He is the Messiah. But people already have a set definition of what the Messiah is. The Messiah is the over thrower of Rome. Jesus' understanding of the Messiah is that the Messiah has come to suffer. He's the suffering servant who will die on the cross.

Therefore in the beginning, you can see this in the early stages of Mark's gospel, Jesus is concerned about his premature identification of him as the Messiah. He in a sense has a messianic secret. He is not letting people openly know who he is. The demons start crying out whenever they're in his presence, "I know who you are! The holy one of God." He says, Shut up! He refuses to let the devil announce his identity. They're in the best position to know. But Jesus does not want the testimony of the devil.

He heals a person and he says to the person, Mark 1, and when he gets through he says, Don't tell anyone what I've done.

Eight chapters later in Mark, Mark 8:27 and following. In Caesarea-Philippi the disciples come to a key moment. After being with them two years, Jesus turns to them and says, Now who do you say that I am. Peter says, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.

It was a concession when it was made Jesus immediately then turns around and tells them not to tell anyone about him and also tells them not to tell anyone he's going to the cross. It's information that for a while he's suppressing. Because to prematurely let his identity out would be to create in the masses of people a false understanding of who the Messiah is. He must be free throughout his ministry to redefine for them what the messiah really stands for.

It is over this question of his identity that the scripture that I read tonight comes into play. All the groups around Jesus have different perspectives of him. The crowds see him as a prophet – Jeremiah, Elijah, one of the prophets. God obviously is already bearing witness to him saying this is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased. The disciples are having their growth experience where at the first they say in John 1, You're the Messiah. They mean by that you're the political savior we've all been looking for. When he begins to redefine that for them by John 6 many are walking away and no longer following him. They're disappearing in droves because he's talking but eat my body and drink my blood.

It's only in Mark 8 that they begin to perceptually see who he is. That he's redefining Messiah for them.

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It is the religious leadership that has the struggles with the identity of who Jesus is. And it is the religious leaders to whom Jesus speaks when he says “All sins will be forgiven a person except the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, for they said he has an unclean spirit.” In other words, the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is connected to something that the opposite was saying against Jesus.

Let's take some moments to ponder and consider what was happening. Of all the people that were in the best position to understand who the messiah really was it would have to be the people. The religious leadership. We find in Matthew 2 when the wise men come. They follow the star and the star has dropped out of sight so they come to Herod's court. They say, Where is he that is born king of the Jews? Who is it that knows where he is to be born? The scribes. They're the experts in the law. They know where the prophets say the Messiah will be born. So they volunteer the information – “In Bethlehem of Judea for Micah has written...” and then they quote Micah. It's very intriguing to know what happens there. The scribes know where he is to be born but they do nothing about the information they have. It's only the wise men that go find him. The scribes knowing where he is to be born simply sit there with the information idly in hand. But they have knowledge. They have knowledge of scripture and Jesus teaches that to whom much is given much is required. They should have been the first persons understanding his messiahship.

Instead they begin to have real problems with Jesus. They hear him in Mark 2 saying to a man, “Thy sins be forgiven thee,” and they question in their hearts saying, “This man has blasphemed.” The word “blasphemy” means, “evil speaking.” It means abusive speech, maybe a more precise term abusive speech.

Euphony is a good word. It's when you want to use a word that is more delicate for a word that is more harsh. You use a euphemism. Blasphemy is the exact opposite of euphony. Blasphemy is abusive speech. And blasphemy from the pharisaic point of view was not just cursing – using God's name as a curse word. Blasphemy was any language or lifestyle that misrepresented God. If you misrepresented God by your lifestyle or by your doctrine, by what you did or by what you said, you blasphemed the name. The Pharisees were even so careful about their speaking of God that they chose to not to even say orally, not to even say the name of God. The covenant name for God which we say Jehovah or Yahweh. It was too sacred. They'd substitute another word for it. They didn't want to in any way be open to blaspheming the name.

So they hear Jesus saying, thy sins be forgiven thee. They say to themselves, That is the prerogative of God alone. If any human being said that must be committing blasphemy. Of course that's Jesus' tremendous point in the gospel of Mark. It's where the opposition sets in when he says I can forgive sin. That's still the issue that divides people over Jesus Christ today. Is he the one who can forgive sins or is he not? All the human race divides on that category. They either believe he can forgive sins or they don't. The Pharisees said he can't. He's not God. It wasn't long until they picked up in Mark 2 other things they followed him for. They didn't like him eating with the sinners and tax collectors. They didn't like him letting the disciples break the Sabbath by plucking grain on the Sabbath. And they didn't like it at all when he healed on the Sabbath. When he healed the man with the withered hand, John 3:1-6, they took offence at that. By this time in the gospels, as you're reading the gospels, people are forming opinions of him. The crowds are saying he's a prophet. The demons are saying he's the holy one of God. God is bearing witness saying this is my beloved Son. The family is coming and saying, he's beside himself, he's slipped one. We've got to get him home quick or to an institution.

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It's the Pharisees though that are setting there saying, He has abusive speech against God. He is only doing what he is doing by the power by the prince of demons, Beelzebub.

Jesus at this point, when they make this charge against him say to them that whoever sins against the Holy Spirit has committed an unpardonable sin. All sin will be forgiven a man whatsoever he commits. But whoever commits this sin blasphemy against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness either in this life or the life to come. In other words what they were saying against Jesus has everything to do with what the unpardonable sin is. What the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is.

It might be noted by the way as you look through the gospels and Acts that you find eventually in Matthew 26 that the charge against Jesus by the high priests is that he has committed blasphemy when he says I am the Son of God. When Stephen bears witness he is accused of blasphemy. When Paul preaches in the synagogue, Acts 13, he is accused of blasphemy, evil speaking of God. So the consistent attitude of the religious leadership all along toward Christ and toward his followers was these persons are blasphemers. The penalty for blasphemy according to Numbers 24 is not only banishment but death. It is a capital offence.

But Jesus picks up on something they well now. That whoever blasphemes, whoever abusively speaks against God is guilty of something which brings about the imposition of a final and lasting punishment.

When Jesus says this he is doing something to the Pharisees. What he's saying is if you say, you who are in the best position to know, if you say that what I am doing, is by the power of the evil one, then you block off all possibility for repentance. Only the Spirit of God can lead us to a true understanding of who Jesus is. The Spirit is upon Jesus. Jesus is conceived of Jesus. The Spirit has anointed him. He does his works by the power of the Spirit. And to attribute that power by which Jesus operated to attribute that power to a source other than God, is to blaspheme. To abusively speak against the Spirit of God that rested upon Jesus is to therefore loose the possibility of salvation because how could you at all hear the message of Jesus if you are saying Jesus operates by the power of an evil spirit rather than by the power of the Holy Spirit.

What is happening in this gospel context, and we don't know here when Jesus speaks whether he's making a pronouncement that the Pharisees have already committed this sin or whether he's simply threatening them. You keep on with this attitude and you'll never have any repentance. Is the pronouncing already a judgment a verdict against them saying, When you say this against me, you have crossed the line and there is no more hope. In attributing my power to the power of the devil you have so evil spoken against God that there is no more hope for you. You've committed the eternal sin. Is this a pronouncement, which Jesus makes? Or is it at this point a threat that he makes if they persist in this and this is what will happen.

It's my personal feeling from the gospels that it is a threat at this point rather than a pronouncement. I don't see the unpardonable sin necessarily as something, which you can do in just one act. Committing the unpardonable sin is a mentality. It is a way of life. It is an on going process. It is a resistant heart. A heart that continually resists what the Lord God is doing. A heart that continually resists the workings of the Holy Spirit. One of the reasons why I feel here it is a threat of warning to the Pharisees is that on the cross Jesus will cry out, Father forgive them, for they know not what they do. And Peter in his sermon in Acts 3 will say that the religious leadership who was responsible for the crucifixion of Christ did it in ignorance. And a

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sin of ignorance could be forgiven. Whereas presumptuous sins or sins of premeditation in the Old Testament law couldn't be forgiven.

But it would seem from the gospel context that those who are being addressed with the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit are persons whom Jesus is threatening saying, if you keep walking this way, if you persist with this judgment against me, then you have committed a sin where you'll eventually find there is no returning point.

I compare what the Pharisees are doing in this way. Suppose you're out working on our new sight. Suppose you're a worker who doesn't know anything but the Lord haven't been to church a day in your life. It's as common and ordinary for you to curse as it is for you to say spaghetti. You're out there working away with a hammer and you accidentally miss the nail with the hammer and hit your thumb instead. Out comes a stream of curses against the Lord abusing his name.

Take that person on one side and take me on the other side. I'm out there, a minister of the gospel, suppose I hit my thumb with a hammer. If I let out the same words as the person who knows nothing about Christ God doesn't judge our sin equally. I'm in a position of far greater responsibility. I know what the name represents. I worship the name. I could never as a Christ, use the Lord's name in vein. I'm not saying that if you have used the Lord's name in vain you've committed the unpardonable sin, but *I* could never use the Lord's name as a curse word. I'm extremely uncomfortable in fact when people tell religious jokes that involve somehow the Lord's name. It makes me terribly uncomfortable.

Because as a person who understands what that name means and represents I am not in a position +to be able to use it in that fashion. That is the precise analogy that Jesus is making with the Pharisees. They of all people, they're not the religious illiterate that are out there using his name. They are people in the know. He's saying there is therefore implications for that. You are in a position to understand the witness that is being made to me. The fact that you're not responding indicates the evil nature in your own heart. The implication is that this sin against the Lord is a sin, which is committed by people who intelligently know what they're doing. Yet they're listening to evil rather than to God.

Another implication I think of the unpardonable sin is that we ought to be very careful to say to somebody "I think you've committed the unpardonable sin." Even Jesus himself ever explicitly told the Pharisees they had committed it. He just warned them about it.

There's another thing that I think should be said by way of implication. That is that we do not know when a person crosses the line. Only God knows that. I personally believe the line is death. That's the one line from which you never come back. Once you die. It's appointed unto man once to die, the scripture says, and after that the judgment. I would take a very wide attitude of God's grace. That there is hope for anyone up till the time death comes.

We need to tie the blaspheme of the Holy Spirit in with the Old Testament teaching on pardonable and unpardonable sin. We've seen this as we've just been through Leviticus. The Old Testament law had two categories of sins. Sins for which there was atonement. And sins for which there was no atonement. This is spelled out in Numbers 15:29-30. There were sins, which are called sins of ignorance. And there are sins which are called presumptuous sins or sins of the high hand. (I love the King James term.) Deliberate sins. If as an Old Testament person

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you committed murder against someone that was premeditated, first degree murder, there was no forgiveness for you under the Old Testament law. You couldn't offer sacrifice to be forgiven. You couldn't go to a city of refuge and be kept hid in the city of refuge. They'd have to cough you up. If you committed adultery. If you broke the Sabbath. If you swore against the name of God. Those kind of things were not forgivable under the Old Testament law. No matter how many sacrifices you wanted to offer, it wouldn't do you any good. They simply involved capital punishment.

That's why David in Psalm 51 cries out, "Sacrifices and burnt offerings would I offer but thou O Lord doest not desire sacrifices and burnt offerings." You better believe it, David! You're dead right. God is not going to accept those for the murder of Uriah and your adultery with Bathesheba. It's all over for you. David has to appeal to something greater than the sacrificial system. He has to appeal to the Spirit of God himself. "A broken spirit and a contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." Did look prophetically beyond the requirements of the law to the idea that maybe even this sin could be forgiven.

Therefore when you compare the Old Testament with the New Testament one of the things that people most often miss in this teaching about the unpardonable sin is how Jesus starts: "I say to you that all sin, whatsoever a person may commit shall be forgiven them, except..." We spend all of our time on the "except." Except the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. But we need to spend some time on the front part of that statement which is a tremendous contrast with the Old Testament. *All* sins. Whatever a person commits they'll be forgiven. That's a tremendous encouragement isn't it? Everything is included under God's forgiveness. There is amnesty in the air because of Christ's death and his resurrection. He is the better sacrifice. He's not died simply for some sins, or sins that were committed before we became his followers. He has died for all sins.

The application then is this. The one sin for which a person will be judged in eternity is resisting the Holy Spirit's witness to Jesus. In the long run the eternal indictment that will returned against a person that will turn them away from heaven's door is the indictment, You stopped your ears and you stopped your heart to the witness the Holy Spirit has made of Jesus.

The gospel of John, John 16:7-11, Jesus says the Holy Spirit is in the world to do three things. He's in the world to convict it of sin, judgment, and righteousness to come. He's in the world to convict the world of sin because it denied Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is in the world to reverse that verdict. He's like a prosecuting attorney. The world has said Jesus is a man, Jesus is a sinner. The Holy Spirit says not at all. He is the savior. He is the Son of God. And the Holy Spirit is out to change the verdict of the cross that the world has delivered upon Jesus. He has come to convict the world of sin. He has come to convict the world of judgment. Because the prince of this world has been judged. At the cross it was not Jesus being judged, it was evil being judged.

The Holy Spirit is again out to overturn the table of human judgment. And he's out to convict or convince the world of righteousness. That Jesus indeed is the righteous one of God. And that righteousness can only be obtained by believing in him. And if a person stops their ears of their spiritual heart to this witness of the Holy Spirit there can be no possibility of salvation because one can only be born again of the Spirit.

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You cannot be God's child except the Spirit of God comes and applies the life of Jesus to you and conceives you into the kingdom of God. Spiritual birth involves the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives. How can we receive Jesus except the Spirit make him real to us. And if we reject the Spirit's testimony, if we keep saying, "No. I disagree Spirit of your verdict of Jesus, your witness of Jesus," there can be no salvation. There is no recoverability from that sin. That's it! It's the eternal indictment. If any one of us ever tries on our own to meet God unprepared, we're not going to be convicted before God simply because we lied or we stole or whatever. The indictment, the charge against us is the charge of rejecting the true nature and person of Jesus Christ. Therefore it's easy to see why this is the unpardonable sin there's no coming back. There's a point of no return when we say something about Jesus that the Spirit himself does not say of him.

Knowing that is the eternal indictment against us then brings us some relief from guilt. It helps us understand when we ourselves commit sin that we have not committed the unpardonable sin. But that we've committed a sin that belongs to the category, all manner of sin shall be forgiven you.

At an altar one time a man came forward, in his mid 50s as a response to a call to salvation. His brother was a well-known minister. He had spent nearly his whole adult life as an alcoholic. His family had been broken many years before because of his alcoholism. He came forward that day as a response. As I went down to pray with him I said to him, "How can I pray with you?" knowing what his need was but wanting to hear it from him. He said, "I really with all my heart want to come to Jesus Christ, but I can't." I said, "Why can't you come to Jesus Christ?" He said, "Because a number of years ago I committed blasphemy against the Holy Spirit and I can't come to Jesus Christ but I really want to." It took me the longest time to turn his head around so that it would agree with his heart. What I said to him was, "You couldn't have this desire to come to Jesus Christ if it weren't for the Holy Spirit. The very fact that you want to be right with God." If you commit blasphemy against the Holy Spirit you're just like the Pharisee. I'm convinced the Pharisees that committed that sin never even realized they did it. They had so blinded themselves. They had become so callous. These were the people that could cheat their own parents. They had become so warped in their religious life and so callous.

The person who commits blasphemy of the Holy Spirit isn't thinking, "I sure would like to come to Jesus Christ but I can't." Only the Spirit of God can draw people to him. I told him, "I've got good news for you. You haven't committed the unpardonable sin." Finally after a long period of time of going through scripture and helping him understand what the unpardonable sin was came a real precious moment when he indeed responded to that desire that was in his heart to receive Jesus Christ.

It's a great comfort to know and I think we can use this in our ministry to people, if we come across people who say "I'd like to come to God but I can't. I've committed the unpardonable sin."

No. You've committed some sin. That's what we ought to distinguish. When a person is convicted there's a reason for it. There's something that's there that needs to be dealt with but it needs to be distinguished from the unpardonable sin.

I think we then need to look at the fact that forgiveness of sin is available even to those who sin as a believer. 1 John 5:9 "If we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." A person who goes on consistently rejecting Jesus

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Christ will become increasingly insensitive of the presence of the Holy Spirit. And a person who steadfastly rejects and resists the witness of the Spirit of Jesus throughout a lifetime can even on their deathbed have a salvation experience. Because the Holy Spirit is gracious. But if a person resists him all the way through life and never changes their verdict of Jesus. Jesus identifies this as the one sin for which there is no recall. There is no repentance possible. There is a crossing of the line into eternity. Because the witness of the Spirit of Jesus has been refused there can be no salvation. The unpardonable sin.

That's why if you're here this evening and you've never come to Jesus Christ, you've never confessed him as Lord, you've never said with your lip and believed in your heart that God has raised Jesus Christ from the dead, you're on serious ground because you're moving in the direction that would cause you to commit the unpardonable sin. You need to change that and change that now.

But if you're here as a believer and you've wondered – "I failed again. I wonder if the Spirit of God is going to quit working with me." Keep listening to the witness of the Spirit of Jesus and keep bringing that sin to him and saying, "Lord, forgive me and cleanse me and empower me by your Spirit to overcome this so that I can be an over comer." The Spirit gives us the power to have our sins forgiven through the blood of Christ and the Spirit gives us the power to overcome in our life a well in consistent areas of failure.

Listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit and obey what the Spirit is saying to us about Jesus.

Our Father, as we look through that scripture this evening of Mark 3, we think, Lord, of your perception of how we who have more knowledge are more responsible for that knowledge. We're not to take the things that belong to you in a callous or a perverted way. We're not to despise the day of grace. Lord, we simply pray that we to whom much has been given will also be faithful in the many responsibilities you've given to us. We pray, Lord, to cleave to you and to be true to you. I pray, Lord, for persons in this body to whom the devil has had a field day with their hearts by working on their low self esteem and low spiritual confidence saying "There is no hope for you. You always disappoint God. You always fail God. Mark 3 refers to you, the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. You can never be saved. You're so bad. You do things wrong all the time. There's no hope for you." Lord, we know that's a lie from the pit of hell. And that the Spirit bears witness within our hearts that we are the sons of God and that the Spirit is picking us up in the moments we feel that we have let you down so miserably. The Spirit is saying, "Yes, here is hope for you. Come to the cross. Lay your sins there at the cross." We're thankful for the faithfulness of the Holy Spirit to bear witness within our heart that Jesus is Lord and that we are the children of God. For the Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are God's children. The devil doesn't bear witness with our spirit. He's all the time telling us we're not God's children. But the Spirit bears witness with our hearts that we are God's sons and daughters. We thank you for this faithful ministry of the Spirit.

Now, Lord, there may be persons here this evening who have not confessed you as Lord and savior and who have resisted what the Holy Spirit says about Jesus. Lord, to say anything about you that is different from what the Holy Spirit says is to speak evil against your name. To regard you as just another human being, to regard you as just simply a great teacher and nothing more is to blaspheme your name. I pray for that person or persons that there would be in their hearts a sober realization that the Spirit in this moment bearing witness to them

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that Jesus is the Son of God, their savior and the only hope for eternal life. Jesus himself has said "I am the way the truth and the life. No one cometh to the Father except by me." I pray, Lord, that each one of us here may be for certain that the agreement of our heart is united with the witness of the Spirit. He is the Christ, the Son of God.

As we have our heads bowed in prayer, if you'd say, "You're speaking right to my heart. I have not accepted up to this moment in my life, the Spirit's witness of who Jesus is. I realize that if I keep going in that direction, I cross a line at some point from which I can never return. I'd like to agree in my heart and agree with my lips with the Holy Spirit that Jesus is Lord." Could I see your hands if that describes you? I want to agree with the Holy Spirit witness of Jesus.

Maybe it is that everyone here this evening has that agreement in their heart. We all will now and affirm your identity. Would you say with me, Jesus is Lord. Jesus is risen. Jesus is my savior. When we say these things, Lord, we agree with the Spirit. Hallelujah!

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