



Matthew 12:30–32

30 “Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. 31 And so I tell you, every kind of sin and slander can be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. 32 Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to

come.

Reflection

Today's passage continues the increasingly hostile confrontations between Jesus and the Pharisees. Since the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, the son of God has been scathing when it comes to how the leaders of God's people have been shepherding his flock. God's people have become like sheep without a shepherd, harassed and helpless; their leaders more often preying on them than protecting them.

Jesus' words are one thing, but it's his popularity that the Pharisees detest the most – they're jealous of the crowds he's drawing. The synagogues are emptying

and the countryside is filling; people are no longer listening to them, and huge crowds from everywhere are going out to listen to him. They're coming to hear the one who speaks with authority 'not like the Pharisees and teachers of the Law' to quote the crowds response at the end of the Sermon on the Mount. And so in verse 14 of Matthew chapter 12 the Pharisees start plotting openly about how they might kill Jesus.

Yesterday we saw a large crowd again astonished at the power of Jesus words and his works, many of them beginning to put the pieces together 'Could this be the Son of David?' as Jesus punctuates his teaching about the kingdom of God with powerful miracles. In response the Pharisees accused Jesus of being a magician – one

you casts out demons by the power of Satan. A serious charge. Conviction carried the death penalty; death by stoning. Jesus didn't need miraculous powers to respond. He publically ridiculed them with cold, hard logic. It's ridiculous to suggest that Satan would drive out his own demons. Not only was what they were suggesting ridiculous, it actually proves the contrary. Because if not by Satan, the by the Spirit of God – which proves that Jesus is who he says he is, the Messiah, God's anointed king, come to drive out the kingdom of the prince of this world, the kingdom of Satan, and replace it with the kingdom of God.

Today Jesus turns first to the large crowd, and then again to his accusers. But first to the vast crowd before him. 'Who are you

going to believe?’ Jesus asks. ‘Them or me?’ Because there is no middle ground. See verse 30,

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

There’s no middle ground with Jesus. You’re either a member of the kingdom of God or a member of the kingdom of this world. You either follow him, or follow Satan. He’s either the king of your world, or you’re the king of the world. There’s no middle ground and it’s time to decide Jesus says to the crowd. They’ve been following Jesus for some time now, consider the things they’ve witnessed, the words they’ve heard. It’s time to decide. They’re either in or they’re out. Whoev-

er is not for me is against me. Abstaining means you're against; apathy means you're against; fence-sitting means you're against; 'I'll consider it more seriously later in life' means you're against; 'I believe in God and consider myself a Christian but don't go to church or really read the bible or do any of that stuff;' ... you're against.

In verses 31 and 32 Jesus then turns his attention back to the Pharisees. They've been silenced, publically embarrassed, they're red-faced with shame and anger but they have no words to say against the wisdom of Jesus. They've just accused Jesus, now he accuses them. They've just levelled a charge against Jesus that carries the death penalty. Jesus now levels a charge against them that carries far, far greater punishment.

Jesus explains to them the true gravity of their situation. They've just accused Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Satan. Jesus is doing so by the power of the Holy Spirit. In case they don't understand the seriousness of what they're saying Jesus warns them in verse 32. 'Look,' he says, 'if:

32 Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man [which is Jesus' favourite Old Testament term for himself] will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

'It's one thing to speak against me,' says Jesus, 'But it is another thing entirely to

‘speak against the Holy Spirit by accusing him of being Satan.’ Then Jesus goes on to speak about the unforgivable sin.

Now the idea of an ‘unforgivable sin’ has made Christians nervous down throughout the centuries. And rightly so. The concept is found here on Jesus’ lips, and in the parallel passages in the other gospels, as well as in Hebrews 6:4–8 and Hebrews 10:26–29. But isn’t an unforgivable sin a bit of an oxymoron that seems to empty the cross of its power? Doesn’t this go against the core of the Christian faith and the wonderful assurance we have in Christ? What are we to make of this?

As with every passage in the bible, context is key. In accusing Jesus of casting demons out by the power of Satan, the

Pharisees have effectively accused the work of the Holy Spirit to be the work of the devil. This is why Jesus warns them so severely. Speaking 'a word' against Jesus is one thing, but anyone 'who speaks,' not just as a once off, but who is so hardened in their belief that they regularly speak of the Holy Spirit as Satanic, well for that person, it is impossible for them to be saved. The reason that this sin is unforgivable comes down to the mechanics of salvation. It's the only true 'unpardonable sin' in the sense that when a person consciously, and wilfully, rejects the operation of the Spirit they technically can't be saved because the Holy Spirit's role in salvation is to bear witness to the reality of Jesus as Saviour. The person who then does not receive this work of the Spirit can't come to know Jesus and therefore can't receive

forgiveness. Rejecting the Holy Spirit as the Pharisees are at risk of doing makes forgiveness, and therefore salvation, impossible. The Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, righteousness, and judgement and therefore he is instrumental in coming to faith in Jesus. And so to reject the Holy Spirit cuts all this off at the pass, and hence to do so is the one, unforgivable sin.

Think & Pray

Take some time now to reflect and pray over this passage of Scripture. So many in our society have rejected Christianity through apathy. What can we do about this as a church? Does the tone we set in our gatherings and the tone we project in our personal faith match Jesus' tone when he speaks about the kingdom of God? What

does Jesus mean about scattering and gathering in this passage? Are you gathering? Jesus says that the harvest is plentiful and what is not gathered will be burned. There's a sobering thought to encourage us to pray. Please do so now.