

The Unpardonable Sin

This study is like walking along a dark, deserted, narrow, moonlit street in a crime filled neighborhood. The events that occur in this study are dark, sinister and evil. The initial event that is described in Matthew and Mark is wonderful, but the rest of the historical account is filled with pride and sin from the pit of hell itself. Most of us recognize evil such as a man raping a woman or a woman gossiping about someone. We recognize lies and dishonesty as being evil, but recognizing lies that have the appearance of truth is often difficult. It is common to joke about politicians or lawyers as being dishonest, but when someone you trust is dishonest, he or she often succeeds. That is not funny. This study (Matt. 12:22-32; Mark 3:20-30) captures our attention with a miracle of Jesus' grace and love. When some trusted leaders created a lie that came from the pit of hell, they were like a brood of snakes biting their victim.

MIRACLE OF GRACE. This historical event started when Jesus returned home (Mark 3:20) after His preaching tour from city to city and town to town (Luke 8:1-3).

And He came home, and the crowd gathered again, to such an extent that they could not even eat a meal. (NASB) Mark 3:20

We discovered earlier that Jesus' home was no longer in the city of Nazareth but in Capernaum which was beside the Sea of Galilee (Matt. 4:13; 9:1; Mark 2:1). News that Jesus was back must have spread like fire attacking dry sagebrush.

Many people came quickly to listen, talk, and be healed by Jesus. In fact, there were so many people that Jesus was not able to eat.

Mark 3:21 tells us that when "His own people" heard about this, they thought that He had lost his senses.

When His own people heard of this, they went out to take custody of Him; for they were saying, "He has lost His senses." (NASB) Mark 3:21

Some have suggested that His "own people" refers to His family. But the

Greek phrase is peculiar and literally means "those from His side." It does not mean "His own people" or "His family." The phrase could refer to His family, friends, associates, or disciples. It is unlikely here that "His own people" refers to Jesus' family alone since it is doubtful that His mother would have ever believed her divine son was crazy. She had known who Jesus was since His birth and from the start of His ministry (see John 2:1-4). It is also doubtful that "His own people" refers to Jesus' disciples since they were already with Him and we are told that these people were coming in order to "help" Jesus. That is, these people were not originally with Jesus. Therefore, "His own people" are most likely friends who did not understand completely who He was or His mission. They did not understand that He was the Messiah. Whoever His "own people" were, it is likely that they came from some other part of Capernaum "to take custody" of Him - "to rescue" Him.

While these people are coming to Jesus, Matthew records that a demon-possessed man was brought to Him.

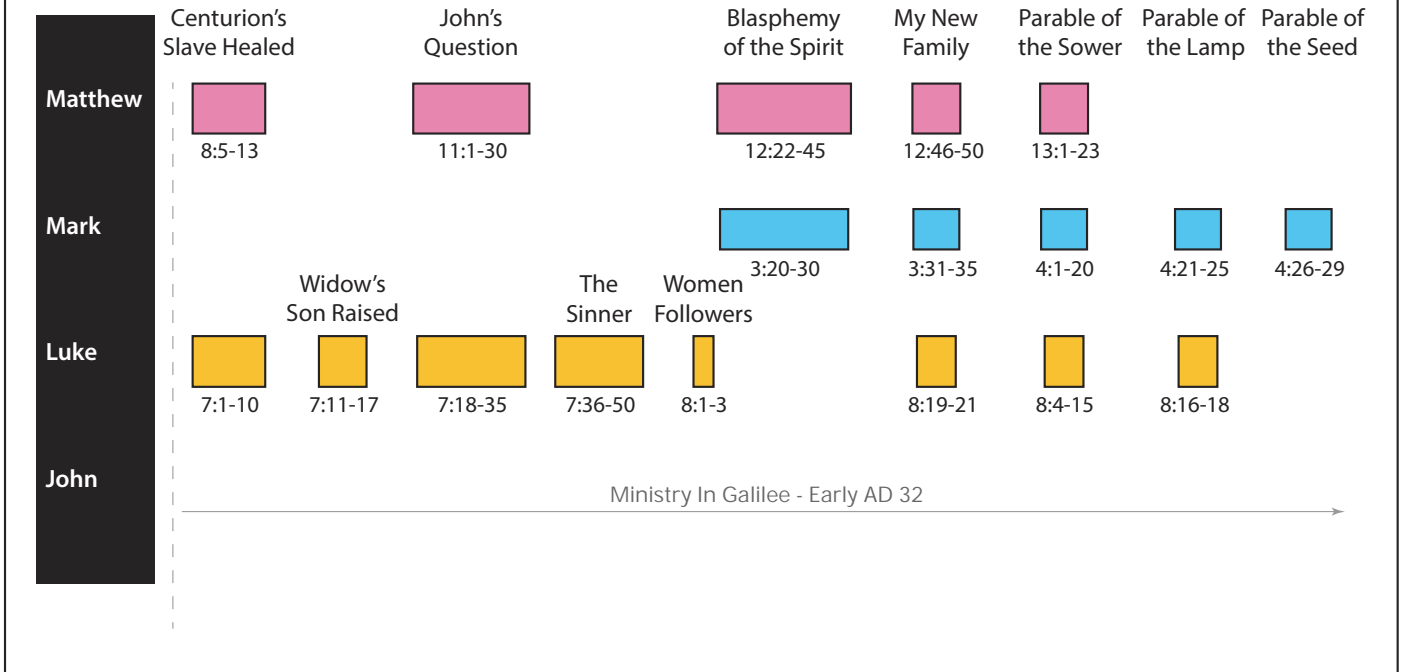
DEMON-POSSESSED MAN.

Then a demon-possessed man who was



Life and Heart of Jesus

Ministry In Galilee



blind and mute was brought to Jesus, and He healed him, so that the mute man spoke and saw. (NASB) Matt. 12:22

be the Son of David, can he?" (NASB) Matt. 12:23

If we skip ahead to the next verse, we discover that apparently enough time had elapsed for more people to gather. The crowd has grown, and now we are told that "crowds" were present when the demon-possessed man was brought to Him. This would suggest that the number of people had increased and were probably in an inner patio of the house.

It was such an overwhelming experience that the people began to wonder if Jesus was the Son of David - the promised Messiah.

With crowds around Him, a demon-possessed man in His presence, and "His own people" coming to rescue Him, Jesus performed an amazing miracle in an amazing setting. Even though the demon was powerful enough to prevent the man from speaking or seeing, the demon submitted to Jesus' command to leave; and he did! The man was now able to speak and see. The crowds were so astonished that they almost failed to comprehend what they had experienced. That is the meaning of the Greek word that is translated as "amazed" in the following verse,

RESPONSE OF THE LEADERS. When the Jewish leaders heard of the crowds' response they responded like a brood of vipers or snakes. They attacked their victim.

The scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons." (NASB) Mark 3:22

The Jewish leaders were either already in Capernaum or had recently come down from Jerusalem in response to the reaction of the crowds. All that we know for sure is that once they were present, they struck at Jesus like a venomous snake. First, they claimed that Jesus was demon-possessed. Then they added that He cast out demons by Beelzebul. Apparently, they did not stop to ask how a demon-possessed man could cast out demons from another demon-possessed

All the crowds were amazed and were saying, "This man cannot

man. These Jewish scribes did not understand their victim. They did not understand that Jesus was their own creator - their God.

Mark 3:23 tells us that Jesus called them to Himself, apparently away from the crowds. When He spoke, they must have been stunned when Jesus revealed that He knew their thoughts.

And knowing their thoughts Jesus said to them, . . . (NASB)
Matt. 12:25a

. . . “How can Satan cast out Satan? . . .” (NASB) Mark 3:23b

“Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste; and any city or house divided against itself will not stand.” (NASB)
Matt. 12:25b

If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. If Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but he is finished! (NASB)
Mark 3:24-26

They must have been as stunned as the crowds but for different reasons. Jesus’ statement was true. Rebellion within a kingdom, country, nation, city or even a home is destructive. Every family which has had teenagers or has ended in divorce understands that rebellion within a home is a major problem. While teenagers can cause major trouble in a home, two parents can eventually destroy a marriage when there is marital strife. Riots in a city can destroy stores and homes, and kill citizens. Anarchy in a nation has the same effect. Jesus had been healing thousands of men and women and casting out demons. If Jesus was demon-possessed and was using demonic powers to cast out other demons, then

He was an anarchist. Imagine a military soldier who is on the battlefield frustrating the efforts of other soldiers and freeing captured prisoners. How long would such a soldier last? Would he be court martialed?

HISTORICAL RECORDS. The Babylonian Talmud was written by Jewish rabbis. In it one can read an accusation that Jesus performed miracles by sorcery or demonic powers,¹ a statement that He was hanged or crucified on a cross,² that He died at the age of 33 or 34,³ and a claim that His body was stolen from the grave and dragged through the streets of Jerusalem.⁴

The gospels directly and honestly state that Jesus was accused by the religious leaders of performing His miracles by the power of Satan. Is it a surprise that Matthew and



The Pharisees Attack Jesus

Mark do not hide these false accusations? Instead of hiding them, they are presented for everyone to read. The gospels are honest and forthcoming, recording historical accounts about Jesus Christ. The gospels also reveal that Jesus was about 33 or 34 years old when He died (Luke 3:23 plus three or four years for His ministry), and that the

Jewish leaders claimed His body was stolen (Matt. 28:11-15). It is important to notice that the written records of the Jewish leaders admit that Jesus performed miracles and wonders, and that His body did not remain in the grave.

Matthew, Mark and the historical records show that the religious leaders could not explain His miracles or wonders, except to claim that His miracles were performed through demonic power. They could not explain how He returned to

1. I. Epstein. The Babylonian Talmud. The Soncino Press. vol. 3, Sanhedrin 43a. 1935, p. 281.

2. I. Epstein, Ibid.

3. I. Epstein. The Babylonian Talmud. The Soncino Press. vol. 3, Sanhedrin. 106a. 1935, p. 281.

4. Paul L. Maier, First Easter. New Yor: Harper and Row, 1973. pp. 117-118.

life, except to claim that His body was stolen. The Babylonian Talmud and other documents actually admit that these things occurred, but they did not want to conclude that He was God.

Is it possible the religious leaders told the truth about Jesus? If we ignore Jesus' masterful response, we find that the records of the secular historians come to Jesus' defense. We have already discovered that the religious leaders hated Jesus, rejected Jesus' claim to be God (John 10:33), and wanted to kill Him.

For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God. (NASB) John 5:18

So, why shouldn't we expect Jesus to be slandered again? From a very unlikely source we read the following,

At His coming the lame shall leap as an hart, and the tongue of the stammerer shall be clear speaking; the blind shall see, and the lepers shall be cleansed; and the dead shall rise, and walk about.⁵

These words were written by Pontius Pilate about Jesus Christ. Some claim that a forged document bearing the name of Pontius Pilate was created in the third century (A.D. 200-299). But the statement above was written in the first century and quoted by Justin Martyr (A.D. 100-165). Pilate's report was in the Roman archives and available to Caesar Antoninus Pius and the Roman Senate.

Flavius Josephus (A.D. 37-97) also wrote that Jesus existed, was the Messiah or Christ, performed "surprising feats," was a teacher of truth, died on a cross, and returned to

life on the third day.⁶ These are significant statements about Jesus. Some have claimed that Flavius did not write those words. But an objective analysis reveals that Flavius wrote about Jesus and that there is every reason to believe that the words were his.⁷

References to Jesus Christ can also be found the Dead Sea scrolls which support the gospel accounts. One Dead Sea scroll refers to Jesus as "the son of God" and the one who was "pierced" and "wounded."⁸ The negative accusations about Jesus can only be found in the Jewish records. Yet, those records are priceless because they admit that Jesus performed miracles, and wonders, and was not in the grave three days after His death.

We should also remember that many Old Testament prophecies about Jesus came true. One amazing prophecy dating from 530 B.C. found in Daniel 9:25-26 specifies the exact year in which the Messiah would die. Jesus died in that week! A prophecy found in Isaiah, dating from 700 B.C., predicted that Jesus would perform



miracles,

Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy (NIV).⁸ Isa. 35:5-6

How does one explain that the ancient critics, the impartial historians, and the early Christians all agreed that these things happened? These are signs from the hand of God.

Jesus did miracles. Jesus cast out demons. The Jewish documents merely provided another explanation how He did them. The brood of vipers even spit their venom in ancient documents for us to read and Matthew and Mark faithfully

6. Flavius Josephus. Antiquities of the Jews 18.3.3

7. F. F. Bruce. The New Testament Documents. Eerdmans Publishing, 1983. p. 105-115.

8. G. R. Jeffrey. The Signature of God. Frontier Research Publications, 1996. p. 99-100.

5. Justin Martyr. First Apology 48

recorded their accusation.

EXORCISMS. Having revealed the error in their accusation that He cast out demons by the ruler of the demons Jesus then added this,

If I by Beelzebul cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? For this reason they will be your judges. (NASB) Matt. 12:27

“By whom do your sons cast out demons?” What wonderful and difficult words. The question was one of wisdom. It was a question that was difficult to answer. The ancient Jews believed that Satan was the prince of demons, the angel of death, and one who could perform magical cures. They were correct, for even Jesus agreed when He said,

If Satan casts out Satan . . . how then will his kingdom stand? (NASB) Matt. 12:26

Jesus agreed that Satan was the leader of a kingdom. The Pharisees were also correct on the third point. Satan could perform miracles, for the book of Exodus tells us that the Egyptian magicians were able to mimic the first three miracles that Moses performed. They were able to turn their rods into snakes (Ex. 7:8-13), turn water into blood (Ex. 7:14-25), and create frogs on the land (Ex. 8:1-15); but they could not create gnats (Ex. 8:16-24) as Moses did. So the Pharisees correctly understood that Satan could and can perform wonders.

The Jews believed that they could perform exorcisms. Josephus records that King Solomon supposedly exorcised demons.⁹ The rabbis claimed to have magical incantations that could exorcise demons. But Jesus did not use magical incantations. With a word, with a command, He would expel the demons. In Luke we discover that the following six words were enough,

. . . “Be quiet and come out of him!” (NASB) Luke 4:35

In Matt. 9:32 we discover that Jesus’ method was unexpected,

As they were going out, a mute, demon-possessed man was brought to Him. After the demon was cast out, the mute man spoke; and the crowds were amazed, and were saying, “Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel.” (NASB) Matt. 9:32

So, why did they accuse Jesus of demon-possession? The answer is easy. They hated Jesus! Since they had rejected the possibility that Jesus was God, their only conclusion for His miracle exorcisms were by Satan, himself. What a stupid conclusion!

UNPARDONABLE SIN. Then Jesus suggests the logical and correct conclusion,

For this reason they will be your judges. But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can anyone enter the strong man’s house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house. He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters. (NASB) Mat. 12:28-30

The only possible explanation for His miracle exorcisms was that they were from God and God alone. Only God has the power to bind the strong man - Satan. And having bound Satan, Jesus was able to do as He wanted, and He DID! Either the religious leaders were for Him or they were His enemy. They either accepted Him or rejected Him.

Then Jesus added this warning,

Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven people, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven. Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come. (NASB) Matt. 12:31-32

The Pharisees had watched Jesus for a long time and concluded that He was not God but was controlled by Satan. Scripture repeatedly tells us that Jesus did miracles, died, and was raised by the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:22; 4:1, 14, 18; Luke 5:17; 10:21; Acts 2:22; 10:38; Romans 8:11; 1 Pet. 3:18). This means the Pharisees gave credit to Satan for what the Holy

⁹ Flavius Josephus. Ibid. 8.2.5

Spirit had done. When the Pharisees did this, they rejected Jesus by rejecting the ministry of the Holy Spirit. They did not believe Jesus did these miracles and wonders. Consequently, history records that they did not believe Jesus was not God. These miracles and wonders should have helped them understand that He was God (John 10:37-38; 20:30-31). They had rejected the objective truth about Christ and reached a seriously wrong conclusion.

When the Pharisees finally concluded Jesus did His miracles by the power of Satan they completely rejected the work the Holy Spirit performed through Jesus Christ. They rejected Christ. They credited the work of the Holy Spirit to Satan. That is, they blasphemed the Holy Spirit. Notice, to say one can blaspheme against the Holy Spirit is another proof the Holy Spirit is God. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit means the person has concluded that Christ is not God. It is the person's ultimate and final rejection of Christ. When they rejected the very proof that Jesus was God, they had finally, ultimately, completely rejected Jesus. There is no forgiveness of this sin since salvation is through Christ and Christ alone. This is the unpardonable sin. Some say that this sin cannot be committed today, but that is not the message of Jesus' statement,

... whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come. (NASB) Matt. 12:32

Anyone who rejects the evidence that Jesus is God and does not believe that He is the only One who can save him or her from the penalty of his or her sins has no hope for eternal life in heaven. The silence and the loneliness in the flames of hell is their eternal destiny. But Jesus came to offer us something better - heaven. God loves us and demonstrated His love for us when Jesus died for us. What a serious warning to each of us and at the same time a wonderful opportunity.

CONCLUSION. As you are reading this, is God calling you to Himself? Stop for a minute and tell Him that you believe He is God, that you are a sinner, and want Him to forgive your sins, and that you want Him to take control of your life. Today is the day of salvation and not tomorrow. This is a call to believe that Jesus performed miracles by divine power - to believe that He was and is God. He calls for you to believe in Him and submit to Him. I would encourage you to ask God to forgive your sins and to yield yourself to Him. May God bless you.