

## INTRODUCTION

Macho men always want to brag about how strong they are. Some boys on a school playground were bragging. Johnny said, "My dad has a list of all the men he can beat up—and all your dads are on his list!" Later that afternoon a knock came on Johnny's house and his dad answered the door. A big angry man said, "Are you Johnny's dad?" He said, "I am." "Well Johnny told my son said you have a list of men you think you can beat up, and my name is on it." Johnny's dad said, "That's right." The big guy started rolling up his sleeves and said, "Well, I don't think you can beat me up. What are you going to do about it?" Johnny's dad said, "I'll mark you off my list."

Guys are always bragging about who's the strongest. Since 1977 there has been a televised event called "The World's Strongest Man." Most of the winners have come from Finland, Iceland, and Eastern Europe. These guys are required to perform amazing feats of strength like pulling a Boeing 747 with their teeth. These aren't body-builders; they are bulked up dudes. One of the competitors from Iceland, who is nicknamed Thor, stands 6'9" and weighs 435 pounds. No six-pack abs on these guys, they go for the full keg!

So who do you think was the strongest man in the Bible? Are you thinking of the book of Judges and the guy with long hair who could kill a lion with his bare hands? Samson was pretty strong, but after he got a haircut in the devil's barbershop, he lost his strength.

In our passage today, Jesus is going to talk about a strong man; then He's going to mention a stronger man. Hopefully, by the time we finish you'll know the identity of the "The World's Strongest Man."

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.' And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, 'He is possessed by Beelzebub! By the prince 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 blasphemes 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 evil spirit.'"

Jesus faced criticism from his biological family. They said He was crazy and they came to rescue Him before He could make a bigger fool of Himself. But the Pharisees leveled a much stronger accusation against Him. They couldn't deny the reality of the miracles He was performing, so they claimed He performed those miracles by the power of Beelzebub, the prince of demons. I'll identify Beelzebub a little later. But immediately we that it's a dangerous thing for religious people to say God's activity actually came from the devil.

When I was in college, I traveled around leading weekend youth revivals. I would play my 12-string guitar and lead songs before I preached. The songs I sang were pretty radical: They weren't in the hymnal. They were radical songs like, "Get all excited, go tell everybody that Jesus Christ is Lord." I can remember being in one church in North Alabama, and as I started leading the first song of the evening, an elderly man stood up, obviously displeased. He shook his head and stomped out into the foyer. He wasn't hard to miss him because there were only about 60 people there that night. He didn't come back when I started preaching. But we had a fellowship after the service, and he walked over to me. His face was red and he was angry. I don't remember his exact words but he said something like, "I don't like you coming into MY church and playing the devil's rock and roll music. And we don't allow guitars in our church. It's the devil's instrument." I guess I was doubly devilish because I played a twelve-string guitar! I wanted to say something like, "Well King David played on a stringed instrument." But I think I just said, "Sir, I'm sorry you were offended." That angry man was sincere in his criticism, but he was doing the same thing those Pharisees did.

Jesus faced continued vitriolic criticism from these religious leaders throughout His ministry. That lets us know that if you're serving God, you can be assured that you'll face criticism.

When Jesus faced false accusations and criticism, He never tried to defend Himself. He usually asked His critics some questions, and answered with a parable. He turned their tirades into teachable moments. In this case He asked, "How can Satan drive out Satan?" And then Jesus, the Master Teacher shared one of his shortest, and most enigmatic parables.

Let me read it to you from the New Living Translation: "Who is powerful enough to enter the house of a strong man like Satan and plunder his goods? Only someone even stronger—someone who could tie him up and then plunder his house." (Mark 3:27 NLT)

Let's examine the parable Jesus spoke, and then we'll talk about the warning Jesus gave.

### **I. THE PARABLE: Jesus came to reverse the work of Satan**

The Pharisees were insulting Jesus when they claimed that He was possessed by Beelzebub. The name "Beelzebub" literally means "Lord of the flies." (The same name of a novel and a 1960s movie.) Beelzebub was a pagan deity of the ancient Phoenicians. He was a god of death, filth, and feces. Ancient man tended to worship that which they didn't understand, but they observed when there was rotteness on the ground—a dead animal, garbage, or open sewage, that before long, tiny white worms would magically appear. Today, we know that those were maggots, tiny eggs laid by the thousands of flies that swarmed around rotteness. The name Beelzebub even sounds a little like the buzz of flies. That was their pagan god of death and filth.

In Jewish literature, Beelzebub was a chief demon, and sometimes even identified as Lucifer himself. So now you realize the depth of the insult they leveled against Jesus. But He used it as an opportunity to give a short but powerful parable. Let's dig into the spiritual meaning of this short parable of the world's strongest man.

## **A. Satan is strong, but Jesus is the strongest!**

Jesus announced to the world that He came to drive out Satan, the prince of this world. He said, "Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out." (John 12:31)

I could have said Jesus is stronger, but He's the *strongest*. Satan is real, and he is strong. But sometimes we make the mistake of give him qualities that only belong to God. God is omnipresent—He is everywhere all the time. God is omnipotent—He is all-powerful. God is omniscient—He knows everything. Satan, which means adversary, is Lucifer, a fallen angel. He isn't omnipresent, but he's fast and has an army of demons. Lucifer isn't all-powerful, but he is like a roaring lion roaming about seeking whom he may devour. Lucifer isn't omniscient, he can't read your thoughts. But, like a snake, he is shrewd and crafty.

So the strong man in this parable is the devil, but Jesus is stronger. His house is this world. Satan is called the prince of this world but this isn't the only world there is. Jesus is the one who came into the world and He has bound Satan and then stolen his possessions. But Jesus wasn't really stealing anything from Satan. He was only reclaiming what Satan stole in the first place. Jesus isn't a thief sneaking in and ripping off someone. He's like a policeman going into a robber's house and handcuffing him to retrieve stolen property that the devil took. Jesus called Satan a thief. He said in John 10:10, "The thief comes only to steal and kill destroy; I have come that they might have life, and have it to the full."

## **B. Satan's "possessions" are people without Christ**

The Bible describes people without Christ this way: "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient." (Ephesians 2:1-2)

The Bible says Satan (who is a spirit, like all angelic and demonic beings) is at work in the lives of people who don't know Christ. Now if you told an unbeliever they were under the control of Satan, they would laugh at you. They would probably say, "Are you crazy? I don't even believe in Satan!"

But the Bible says in 2 Corinthians 4:4, "The god of this age [Satan] has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God." Even for people who don't believe God exists or the devil exists, Satan is actively keeping their minds shut to the truth about Jesus. They are slaves to Satan without even knowing it.

There is a species of ant in the Amazon area of South America called the Slave-making ant. Hundreds of these ants periodically swarm out of their nest and attack colonies of weaker ants. After destroying the living ants, they carry back the larvae of un-hatched ants. When these young ants are hatched, they are forced to be slave ants. These worker ants are born thinking they belong to the colony never realizing they were forced to be slaves from the time they are born.

That's a picture of humanity. Without realizing it, when we are born, we are born in slavery to sin and Satan. We all need a Savior to come and rescue and reclaim us from the strong man. That's what the strongest man, Jesus came to do!

### **C. Jesus bound and robbed Satan on the cross**

The very act where the strongest man, Jesus robbed the devil was at the crucifixion. The Bible says, "Having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross." (Colossians 2:14-15)

Years ago Hal Lindsey wrote a book entitled, *Satan is Alive and Well and Living on Planet Earth*. I don't agree with that. Whenever I hear someone say, "Satan is alive and well," I correct them by saying, "He may be alive, but Satan hasn't been well since the cross." God dealt Satan a mortal wound at the cross.

The Bible says, "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work." (1 John 3:8) "By his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil." (Hebrews 2:14)

So what does this mean to us? The devil is a defeated foe. He is still active, but he was rendered powerless on the cross. He knows his doom is sealed. He's smart enough to read Revelation 20:10 that says, "And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever."

You may be thinking, "Pastor if the devil is a defeated foe, he sure is causing me a lot of misery." He's like a wounded animal. He's going to fight to the end, although his defeat is sure. It's like when the Nazis realized the war was lost, Hitler issued the Nero Decree. He told his retreating armies to destroy everything of value. Satan is doing the same thing. He continues to steal, kill, and destroy. But he no longer has any authority over you. He will try to kill your joy, steal your peace, and destroy your testimony, but his power is broken. You can say to him, "Get away from me, Satan, because greater is he who is in me than he who is in the world!" You're strong, but I have the strongest man living in me!

So that's the parable. But because these religious leaders accused Jesus of being in union with Satan, Jesus responded with a stern warning about their spiritual blindness.

## **II. THE WARNING: Jesus will forgive every sin except persistent rejection of the Holy Spirit's conviction**

Confusion about the "unpardonable" sin has caused a lot of needless confusion and guilt. When I served as pastor of a church in North Alabama during the early 1980s, there was an usher in our church named John. He was a sweet man who was always present in his regular spot to greet people and hand out bulletins. But John was a very troubled man. On several occasions I met

with him and he began to weep as he told me that during World War II he had done something he thought was so evil that he was certain he had committed the unforgivable sin. I tried to help him by telling Him God could forgive every sin except the sin of unbelief, but that didn't change his mind. John never told me what he had done, but he was convinced he would never go to heaven. He attended church and served the Lord faithfully. His family was active in the church, and his children were talented singers, but he was tormented with the belief that he had committed the unpardonable sin and that he would never make it to heaven.

A few years ago I heard from John's daughter that he had died. From everything I knew about John and his life I believe he's in heaven. But he missed out on so much peace and joy in this life because he was tormented by the belief that his sin was unforgivable.

John isn't the only person who has told me they fear they committed the unforgivable sin. I've had dozens of people tell me the same thing. Maybe you've even wondered if you've committed the unforgivable sin yourself. Let me start by saying what I tried to tell John: If you are concerned that you have committed the unforgivable sin, the fact that you are burdened about it means you probably haven't!

So, what is the unforgivable sin? Let me tell you what it is NOT. It is not murder. Moses was a murderer and he'll be in heaven. The unforgivable sin is not adultery. King David committed adultery and God forgave him. It's not divorce. The woman at the well had multiple divorces and she was forgiven. It is not suicide. Suicide is self-murder and it is no different from homicide—both are forgivable. You may say, "Well, a person who commits suicide can't repent of that sin because they're dead." If that's your attitude, then you don't understand salvation. Once you are a Christian, you don't have to confess every single sin you commit in order to go to heaven. We confess our sins to stay in fellowship with God, but when you surrender your life to Christ, every past sin you've committed and every future sin you will ever commit is covered by the blood of Jesus Christ.

In Revelation 12 Satan is called the Accuser of the Brethren. He wants to keep you confused and unsure. He slips up to you and says, "You're no good, you're no good, you're no good, baby, you're no good. How dare you sit in the choir and sing praises after all you've done? How dare you teach a Bible Study class after all you've done? How dare you sit in church after the things you've done?" When he whispers that and accuses you, just do and Jesus did when He was tempted, quote scripture in the face of his accusations. Try 1 John 1:7: "Mr. Devil, The blood of Jesus Christ, God's son, cleanses me of ALL sin." God has placed my sins in the depths of the sea and has placed a "no fishing" sign there. God has placed my sins behind His back and remembers them no more. God has separated my sins as far as the East is from the West! And you got your nose bloodied at the cross, so leave me alone!" Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

So what is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit? Jesus said: "When he [the Holy Spirit] comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment." (John 16:8) Before you can ever be saved, you must experience a sense of guilt over your sinful condition. Jesus said this is the role of the Holy Spirit. It's not my job to make you feel guilty, that's the job of the Holy Spirit. Scary stories may bring fears and sad stories may bring tears, but only the

Spirit of God can bring true conviction of sin.

The word blasphemy means to "speak against." So blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is when a person says, "No" to the conviction of the Holy Spirit. In that moment they are "speaking against" the Holy Spirit.

I like the paraphrase from the Message: Jesus said, "Listen to this carefully. I'm warning you. There's nothing done or said that can't be forgiven. But if you persist in your slanders against God's Holy Spirit, you are repudiating the very One who forgives, sawing off the branch on which you're sitting, severing by your own perversity all connection with the One who forgives." (Mark 3:28-29 MSG)

Billy Graham wrote a great book in 1980 entitled *The Holy Spirit*. He identified three sins against the Holy Spirit. You can grieve the Spirit, and that's forgivable. You can quench the Spirit, but that sin can be forgiven. But blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is unpardonable. He writes: "The unpardonable sin involves the total and irrevocable rejection of Jesus Christ. It is rejecting, completely and finally, the witness of the Holy Spirit, which declares that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who alone can save us from our sins. No one has committed the unpardonable sin who continues to be under the disturbing, convicting, and drawing power of the Holy Spirit." (*The Holy Spirit*, p. 124)

So, the only sin God won't forgive is terminal unbelief. And the reason God won't forgive that sin is because the person who commits it will never ask God to forgive them. If you are someone who considers yourself to be an unbeliever, I appeal to you to trust Jesus today. Every time you say, "No" makes it easier to say, "No" the next time. There is more to life than this life. And the moment after you die, you will realize this. One day we will face eternity.

## CONCLUSION

So what is our take-away? If you are still under the conviction of the Holy Spirit, you haven't committed the unpardonable sin. But our point of rejoicing today is to know that because Jesus has defeated the devil, we can have victory over the devil as well!

On the evening of June 18, 1850, a man stood in the bell tower of London's Winchester Cathedral staring anxiously out to sea. All of England was waiting for a report of the Battle at Waterloo between British general, the Duke of Wellington, and the French dictator, Napoleon Bonaparte. The torch signals from a ship in the English Channel were sent by code. The message read: "Wellington defeated..." At that moment a thick fog rolled in. The man in the tower signaled the news across the city and there was great gloom and sadness because that meant Napoleon would next invade England. But hours later the fog lifted and the rest of the message could be read: "Wellington defeated the enemy." Sadness and despair was replaced with joy and celebration.

When Jesus died on the cross, it would seem as if He had been defeated. But on Easter Sunday morning the rest of the message was received. Jesus defeated the enemy! And we can rejoice today. The World's Strongest Man has defeated our enemy!

## OUTLINE

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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes



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