

**“All Sins Will Be Forgiven”**

*“Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man” (Mark 3:28).*

Have you ever done something so awful and appalling that it caused you to question whether or not you could be forgiven? Have your thoughts ever been so riddled with guilt and racked with shame that you felt there was no way that God could accept you? Have you ever found yourself struggling with the same tired sin that has plagued you for years and wondered if your repeated failure meant that God had rejected you? If any of these scenarios have ever described you, then the words of Jesus in today’s Gospel reading are the most important words you will ever hear. Today, Jesus says, “Truly, I say to you, *all sins will be forgiven*” (Mark 3:28).

This promise is hidden in the middle of a contentious conversation between Jesus and the scribes; a conversation that began when these Jewish leaders claimed Jesus was possessed by a demon. Now, aside from the fact that this ridiculous accusation made no sense, this statement was blatantly blasphemous because in it the scribes had equated the miracles of the Messiah with the work of the devil. So, in response, Jesus first discredited the illogical statement of the scribes with a proverb about a house divided, and then he moved on to the more serious issue of their blasphemy. And this is what Jesus said, “Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin”— for they had said, “He has an unclean spirit” (Mark 3:28-30).

This is an odd rebuke because it begins with a radical statement of grace in which Jesus declares, “*all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter.*” These words express a promise from God that we refer to as objective justification and it is one of the most important teachings in the entire Bible. You see, the phrase objective justification refers to the truth that on the cross and in the death of Jesus every sin of every person of every time has been punished. And the enormity of this teaching cannot be overstated.

You see, the doctrine of objective justification means that sin has been dealt with; that your most appalling, shameful, and persistent sins were placed on Jesus at Calvary; that nearly 2,000 years ago, outside of the city walls of Jerusalem, at a definite time and in a particular place, God punished His Son for the sin of His creatures; and that there, through the blood of Jesus – and completely outside of our efforts and without our knowledge or permission – the price for our sin was paid in full. Objective justification means that God has accepted you. Objective justification means that you have nothing to be ashamed of because the sin that has haunted you and racked you with guilt is – in God’s eyes – gone.

This is one of the greatest and most comforting doctrines in all of Scripture. It points to the sufficiency of the cross and the power of Christ’s death to completely save sinners. It is the core of our faith and it is the ground of our hope...and that’s what makes the next words from Jesus so troubling. Jesus continues His diatribe against the scribes with this simple and terrifying word: “But...” And with a laser-focus on the self-righteous teachers of the Law Jesus said, “But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin.” These are chilling words that we would never want to hear from Jesus and yet, today, we can’t ignore them and we must be very clear about the death sentence these words contain.

You see, the scribes had attacked Jesus with the slanderous charge that He had an “unclean spirit.” These men who were so familiar with the Word of God had not only given in to the temptation of Satan, but they had actually become his mouthpiece. And in their rejection of the Messiah of God, they had rejected the very call and work of the Holy Spirit. And for this sin, there is no forgiveness.

Now before you tune me out completely, you need to understand what I mean by this statement. You see the work of the Holy Spirit is always and only to point to Jesus. In John 15, when Jesus was just hours away from His death, He promised His disciples that He would send the Spirit from the Father (John 15:26) and that the Holy Spirit would bear witness to the work of Jesus that was about to be fulfilled on Good Friday. It’s not that God can’t or won’t forgive, or that there is a sin that is too big for God to handle, but in rejecting the Word and work of the Holy Spirit these scribes had actually refused the very forgiveness that Christ took on flesh and died a sinner’s death to secure. And when the forgiveness of sins through the work of the Holy Spirit has been rejected, there is simply nothing left to save sinners.

The Holy Spirit’s job is always to take the objective truth of the forgiveness that Jesus died to accomplish for the world and to make it known to us personally. And this is no small thing! Without the work of the Holy Spirit delivering the forgiveness that Jesus won for us on the cross, the fact of our justification remains objective – or outside of us – and we remain in our sin. But when the Holy Spirit works, He makes the objective fact of our justification very personal, and, in truth, anyone who is saved is saved because the Holy Spirit has called him by the Gospel and worked faith in his heart and given a dried up and dead sinner new life! And this simply cannot happen without the Holy Spirit doing what the Holy Spirit does!

The harrowing words from today’s Gospel reading should get our attention and they should shake us up because the warning given by Jesus to these scribes 2,000 years ago is just as real and just as serious for us today. You see, you and I are no better than the ancient scribes to whom Jesus spoke, and the truth is...we have all done awful and appalling things, and we have all wrestled with guilt and struggled with shame; and we have all replayed and repeated the failures of the past. And as a result, we have all questioned our worth and doubted our salvation and wondered if we have been rejected by God.

But before you despair and before you give up, before you give in to the tug of temptation or the pull of your pride, please understand that the regret for your moral failings, and the sorrow over your shortcomings, and the fear of God’s wrath, and the anxiety about unforgivable sins are all wonderful works of the Holy Spirit and reassuring signs of repentance. And a repentant heart is always met by God with grace.

My friends, the Holy Spirit is still present, and the Holy Spirit is still active, and the place where the Holy Spirit works is in God’s Word, and the time when the Holy Spirit speaks is now. And so today, the Holy Spirit is here to save you in this Word of Christ: “Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven...” Receive this Word of life from the Spirit, and go in the peace of this promise God has made to you today, and all God’s people say, “Amen.”

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