



# TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

## **"If You Only Knew What I Have Done"**

Mark 3.20-35

David Anguish

### *A Big Question*

In 2006, Wisconsin minister Roy Ratcliff wrote a book entitled, *Dark Journey, Deep Grace*. He told of a question he often heard from Christians who learned a jail ministry conversion had occurred. Was the convert sincere, or was it a "jailhouse conversion"? That bothered him.

- He didn't think questions about a person's sincerity were inappropriate; there have been many whose post-baptismal life led someone to ask why no change had occurred.
- But Ratcliff realized that "the people asking me didn't know about [the prisoner's] post-baptismal life. They were basing their question on what he did before he was baptized, not after." They judged him "not by his faith, but by his crimes, . . . and seemed to be looking for a way to reject [him] as a brother in Christ instead of seeing him as a sinner who has come to know God."

Their unspoken premise was that some sins are too bad to be forgiven. We understand their question better when we learn that the baptized prisoner about whom they asked was Jeffrey Dahmer, whom Ratcliff had baptized while he was serving his sentence for brutally murdering seventeen people. Could Jeffrey Dahmer be forgiven?<sup>1</sup>

The question takes different forms, and is not always about another's conversion experience. Sometimes, it comes from a Christian who is guilt-ridden over a particular sin. Sometimes, it is more theoretical: what if I commit a sin that puts me beyond the reach of God's grace?

Sometimes, people who ask do so in light of one of these Bible texts: 1 John 5.16; Hebrews 6.4-6; or Mark 3.28-29 (= Matt 12.31-32; Luke 12:10) where Jesus said, "whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness" (Mark 3.29 ESV). What did he mean? Should we worry?

### *Context*

It helps us understand what Jesus said about blasphemy and forgiveness if we understand that the three episodes in 3.20-35 comprise a single unit following Jesus' selection of the Twelve to "be with him" (3.14). The text is one of several places where Mark uses the technique of beginning one story and then inserting another before concluding the first (see 5.21-52; 6.7-32; 11.12-25). These "sandwiches" show that the stories involved are somehow related.

When we see the three stories as a unit describing actions of three groups of people, we begin to see the one thing holding them together. Each represents a response to Jesus; only one was right.<sup>2</sup>

1. Jesus' family members think he is "out of his mind" and try to seize him (3.20-21).
2. Critics accuse Jesus of being a sorcerer in league with Satan (3.22-30).
3. Those who do God's will are treated favorably as Jesus' true "family" (3.31-35).

### *Analysis*

The question of the unforgivable sin comes from the second part, one of several passages where we learn that Jesus was accused of being in league with Satan and guilty of blasphemy (Matt 12.22-30; cf. 9.34; Luke 11.14-23; John 7.20; 8.48, 52; 10.20). We need to recall some things from the Old Testament to understand these charges.

1. Moses' law said that blaspheming the Lord's name was a capital offense (Lev 24.16).
2. Dabbling in magic, the occult, and invoking alien divinities was considered rebellion against the Lord and was also punishable by death (Deut 13.1-10).<sup>3</sup>

When they charged Jesus with doing his works by the power of Beelzebul (Mark 3.22), they referenced a name derived from the name of a Canaanite god which meant, "lord of the high place." 2 Kings 1.2-6, 16 tells us that King Ahaziah sent messengers "to inquire of Baal-zebul, whether I shall recover from this sickness" (2 Kings 1.2). To say Jesus was using the power of Beelzebul was to say that he was aiding and abetting a false god, an agent of evil.

John tells us more. In John 8.48, the Jews accused Jesus of having a demon because they heard him say he was greater than Abraham (v. 52). When Jesus said that Abraham had seen his day and rejoiced, and that "before Abraham was, I am" (v. 58), they tried to stone him (cf. Deut 13:10). In John 10, his declaration that he had authority received directly from the Father was again met with the charge that he was demon possessed (10.19). As the debate intensified, he said he was able to do his Father's works and grant eternal life and security. He then declared, "I and the Father are one" (10.30). The Jews again sought to stone him, "not for a good work . . . but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God" (10.33).

As his critics saw things, Jesus subverted true teaching. They agreed that he did amazing works, but their law had taught that amazing works did not prove a teacher's authenticity (Deut 13.1-5). They rejected Jesus' works as "signs of God's kingly power" (Hurtado, 65). Jesus responded with some short parables and a declaration of the true source of his works.<sup>4</sup>

1. He exposed the inconsistency of saying that Satan was defeating himself (3.23-26).
2. He implied he was attacking Satan's "house" in preparation for a final assault (3.27).<sup>5</sup>
3. He claimed to act by the power of the Holy Spirit, not an unclean spirit (3.28-30). Mark has already said that Jesus had been anointed with the Holy Spirit (1.10, 12). There were only two options: Satan's power or God's. Since it could not be Satan's power, it must have been God's. But they were rejecting it.

### *Security*

We are ready to answer those who worry about committing the unpardonable sin. In Mark 3, Jesus warned about a specific sin: rejecting his message by attributing it to Satan, not God's

Spirit. To say that the work of the anointed Christ was the work of Satan was the ultimate case of calling good evil (Isa 5.20-21), an attack on the nature of God himself.

Why is that sin unforgivable? Because anyone who rejects Jesus as being Satanic will have no concern about receiving his forgiveness. Relative to 1 John 5.16, another text with a background of people denying that Jesus was really God's Son who had come in the flesh (cf. 1 John 4.2-3), Michael Moss points out that saying Jesus was not really from God "is ultimate spiritual death. There simply is no place to go if you turn your back on Jesus."<sup>6</sup>

What, then, shall we say to the one who is wrestling with doubt and guilt about some sin?

1. Remember, the sin Jesus had in mind is very specific: rejecting him and his forgiveness. It is "not a single event or action. It is a stance, or attitude" (Moss, 111-112). The criminal on the cross was told to expect paradise (Luke 23.23). The murderers of Jesus were permitted to repent, submit to baptism, and receive the gift of the Spirit (Acts 2.22-39). The sexually immoral, idolaters, men who practiced homosexuality, thieves, greedy, and drunkards were among the washed granted entrance into God's kingdom (1 Cor 6.9-11).
2. Being concerned about your sin is evidence you are spiritually sensitive, willing to hear and submit to Jesus, and therefore not guilty of the sin he said can never be forgiven.

"But you don't know what I have done!" someone says. That's the beauty of God's love. No one—not Jeffrey Dahmer and not the most self-righteous, condescending churchman—is beyond God's grace if he repents and accepts God's forgiveness. John's assurance should be ours: "[I]f we are living in the light, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin. If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness" (1 John 1.7-9 NLT).

These are the people who do God's will. They are Jesus' family. Are you among them?

*www.davidanguish.com*

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Roy Ratcliff with Lindy Adams, "Saving Jeffrey Dahmer," <http://www.beliefnet.com/Faiths/Christianity/2006/11/Saving-Jeffrey-Dahmer.aspx#>. Accessed April 30, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Larry Hurtado, *Mark*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1983, 1989), 64.

<sup>3</sup> Deuteronomy 13 acknowledged that a sign or wonder could be successfully performed by a false prophet, but says the real issue is loyalty to God.

<sup>4</sup> The word παραβολή, (*parabolē*) refers to a comparison or analogy. Jesus' use of this common teaching device, with both short sayings and longer stories, was concerned with the central message of God's kingly power (see Hurtado, 68-69).

<sup>5</sup> Some see an allusion to Isaiah 49.24-25 in the reference to "the strong man." If so, "the plundering of Satan is also to be understood as a sign that the future role of God promised in the prophets is being exhibited already" (Hurtado, 65-66). See the parallel passages (Matt 12.28; Luke 11.20) which declare the exorcisms to be demonstrations of the advent of God's reign.

<sup>6</sup> C. Michael Moss, *Lord, Sometimes I Don't Feel Saved: Renewing Our Confidence in Christ* (Webb City, MO: Covenant Publishing, 2002), 111.