



WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“IS THERE AN UNFORGIVEABLE SIN?”

John Galbreath
Bible Study Series

Text: Matthew 12:22-37
Date: February 27, 1949

About Westminster's Galbreath Bible Study Series:

This lesson is one taken from a sermon preached by John Galbreath at Westminster Presbyterian Church on February 27, 1947.

To complete the lesson, we suggest that you begin by reading the designated Bible passage (Matthew 12:22-37).

Next, review the outline of the sermon. Reflect on the chosen scripture and how you would “fill in” the remainder of the message from the chosen passage.

You might also want to look at the words of the hymns that were part of the service that day:

All Hail the Power

Jesus Calls Us

O For a Closer Walk

The choir's anthem was the 48th Psalm.

Then, review the study questions posed about the lesson — whether by yourself or in your small group.

Finally, share your thoughts on the Galbreath Bible Study blog on the Westminster Intranet.

I. The Story

A. Jesus had aroused opposition of Sanhedrin

1. The thread that runs throughout the story of Jesus' life
2. They had tried, unsuccessfully, to refute his preaching
3. Now they tried to deride his miracles

B. The miracle

1. A blind and dumb lunatic came to Jesus -- three miracles in one
2. People were amazed
3. Pharisees unable to refute the miracle

C. The charge of the Pharisees

1. Miracle done by the power of Beelzebub
2. Believed both God and Satan had supernatural power
3. Beelzebub -- pagan god of the dung-hill
4. A filthy epithet

D. Jesus reply to the charge

1. Satan would not work against himself
2. What of the Jewish exorcists -- are they of Satan too?
3. Only He who had overcome Satan could perform those miracles -- and that, the Spirit of God

E. His counter charm

1. Those professional religionists could see only that his works were a publicity stunt
2. Blind to the fact that they were done out of a spirit of mercy and love
3. So bound up with the institution they were propagating, they had become blind to the God they presumably worshipped

4. They who thought themselves righteous had placed themselves beyond the grace of God, and were of all men, most guilty
5. "Either make the tree good, and its fruits good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad"

II. The Application

A. What is the "unforgiveable sin"?

1. It is not an act, whereby we may say "Today, I have decided to commit the unforgiveable sin"
2. It is not what one does, but what one becomes
3. It is a denial within our own lives of the power of God

B. Those who think they have attained righteousness, so feel no need for the grace of God

1. Few people would have the effrontery to say, "I am perfect."
2. Many through their actions and attitudes give of that spirit
3. They read the scriptures as critics
4. They come to church to criticize the service
5. This is the temptation of ministers and church leaders
6. Christ said that those who have honest doubt will be forgiven, but those who have no doubts are under condemnation already
7. The Grand Inquisitor. When Christ came back to the Church in Spain, he was expelled from the Church He founded

C. Those who know they do wrong, but are satisfied to remain that way.

1. Frenchman who said, "Ah, there are no longer any hypocrites!"
2. A popular illusion -- to admit one's guilt is to be relieved of responsibility for it.
3. One step lower than hypocrisy
4. Those who are satisfied to wallow in the slough of their own excesses.

D. Why is it "unforgiveable"?

1. It is not that God is unwilling to forgive
2. We place ourselves beyond his mercy
3. Unrepentant deserter in Navy brig.

III. Conclusion

He who fears he has committed the unforgiveable sin may be assured he has not. Those who are certain they have not should examine carefully.

Study Questions -- Part I

Bible Reading: Matthew 12:22-37

Matthew 12:22 says: "Then they brought him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see."

- It is difficult for someone to live with the challenges of being blind and mute in today's world. What do you imagine it must have been like in Jesus' time?
- How do you think someone demon possessed would behave?

Matthew 12:23 says: "All the people were astonished and said, 'Could this be the Son of David?'"

- Why do you think this verse reinforces the connection to David?

Matthew 12:24 says: "But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, 'It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons.'"

- Why would the Pharisees assume it was Beelzebub and not God behind the miracles?

Matthew 12:25-28 say: "Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, 'Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand. If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? And if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your people drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. '"

- Are there ways in which your house is divided against itself? What about Westminster? What about the South Hills? The United States? How would Jesus counsel us to bring about reconciliation?

Matthew 12:29 says: "Or again, how can anyone 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."

- What would a thief find it impossible to take from you?

Matthew 12:30 says: "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters."

- Do the people with whom you interact know that you stand with Jesus? How can you better demonstrate that in your daily life?

Matthew 12:31 says: "And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven."

- Why is blasphemy against the Spirit singled out here?

Matthew 12:32 says: "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."

- Do you think this phrasing was so that those who had stood against Jesus could know that they could be forgiven? Why do you think there is the added definitive statement about the Holy Spirit?

Matthew 12:33 says: "Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit."

- How would people describe you by the fruit that you produce?

Matthew 12:34 says: "You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks."

- How can we challenge ourselves so that we don't say evil things?

Matthew 12:35 says: "The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him."

- Looking at another combination, how can each of us bring good out of the evil we may face?

Matthew 12:36 says: "But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken."

- How can we model the behavior of avoiding careless words?

Matthew 12:37 says: "For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned."

- Since we know that we are saved through grace and our sins are forgiven, in what way do you think we remain condemned by our words?

Study Questions -- Part II

Sermon :

I.A.2. Dr. Galbreath reminds us that throughout Jesus' life people had tried to refute his preaching. How do you see people doing that today?

I.A.3 Do you think seeing a miracle makes it easier to believe? Coming from a time when logic is prized, what do you think your reaction would have been to a miracle like the raising of Lazarus?

I.C.2 and 3 Why do you think it was so important to the Pharisees to make such a vile association?

I.D. Here Jesus appeals to logic. How could the Pharisees have believed that "Beelzebub" would cast out demons?

I.E.1 The concept of a publicity stunt is of our time. Are there people today who you think try to create publicity stunts to achieve a purpose for their faith?

II.A. What would you place on a list of unforgiveable sins?

II.A.2. Dr. Galbreath posits that it is not what we do but what we become that is an issue. What do you imagine someone can become that can separate him or her from the love of God?

II.B. Can you think of people you know who don't feel the need for the grace of God? How would you help them to see their need?

At II.B.3 there is a handwritten note "Critic of a masterpiece." What do you think that note meant to Dr. Galbreath?

At II.B.4 there is another handwritten note saying "Patrons of God." Why do you think that was included?

II.B.6 How would you define "honest" doubt? Why do you think Jesus said that those who have no doubts are already condemned?

II.C. In what way is the desire to change an important first step to achieving God's plan for us?

II.D. Look back at your list of sins you think are unforgiveable. Why did you place them on your list?

II.D.2 How do you put ourselves beyond God's mercy?

At II.D. 1 there is a final handwritten note saying "God won't inflict his grace." Why is that appropriate at that point?

III. Why do you think Dr. Galbreath chose to end this sermon with these words of comfort for those who may feel beyond forgiveness.

There is a note in the bulletin stating: Only you can keep our church a friendly place to worship. Speak to those near you following our morning worship. What can each of us do, individually, to make a visit to Westminster more welcoming and satisfying?