



The Power of Grace

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Mark 3:22-30

Clint Pressley

²² And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "by the prince of demons he casts out the demons." ²³ And he called them to him and said to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? ²⁴ If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵ And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. ²⁶ And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end. ²⁷ But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house.

²⁸ "Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, ²⁹ but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin"— ³⁰ for they were saying, "He has an unclean spirit."

(Pastor prays)

John Newton was a great blasphemer. In fact, that's what he called himself. He was born in 1725 into a home that had a devoutly Christian mother and an irreligious, foul-mouthed sea captain father. Before he was seven years old, his devout mother died of some mysterious disease and he was left with his foul-mouthed, irreligious father. By the time he was 11 years old, he was at sea with his dad. At sea he learned all of the terrible things that you can imagine that made the 18th Century sailors infamous. By his own admission, he said that there was not a crime or a sin that he did not commit. It didn't take long to resolve that money could be made not just by being a captain of a ship; more could be made if you were sailing on a slave ship if you would be daring

enough to run the middle passage with human cargo. So he became what he later would call the Great African blasphemer. He was treating people like animals in ways that would not even be fit to talk about here at church to his everlasting shame. Until one evening when he was 23 years old, he was on his way back from some terrible tour and off the coast of Ireland a storm came up. And in the midst of that storm, as he was panicking, it felt as if that ship was about to go down, as many in that day and time did. "In that instant," he says, "I remembered what my mother taught me in the catechism and in the Bible." And in his panic, he cried out to God and he said, "God have mercy on me; in the name of Jesus, save me." And God saved him. God not only saved him that evening, God quieted the storm and he landed safely in Ireland.

Years later when he was writing hymns with his partner William Cowper he would write the song that we know as the world's most famous hymn. It has that beautiful first line that says, "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me." Do you know the grace of God? It's the theme of this passage. Let's make sure we stay within the context. Let's go here to the passage. I will be doing expositional preaching which means that you find yourself in the Bible and you need to know: what's the context? What is the author telling us?

So if you take the context, the verse after this passage down to verse 31, we find out that Jesus mother and His brothers are there. They have traveled over to Capernaum. They've come from Nazareth. We want to know why are they there. Well, the verse before this passage in verse 21 tells us that they are there because they think He has lost His mind. And here in this passage, Jesus pushes the scribes aside and His family aside, and He opens up for us the power of God in forgiveness and the fury of God in rejection. Very seldom in the Bible do you have the juxtaposition of God's grace on one hand and eternal judgment on the other. So what I want to do is take this passage and let's just look at it together. Let's look at it through the lens of grace. Because...

All the Power of God's Grace is Found in Jesus

Let's go and see what we can find in verse 22 as we use that theme of grace. This is my first point. Number one. I want you to see that...

The confusion of grace is growing

The confusion of grace is growing not only in the Bible. The confusion surrounding grace is growing in our day. Before we get to that, let's find out what's going on here in verse 22. We find out that the scribes came down from Jerusalem. The scribes are the lawyers. They're the ones who know the law. They are the officials of the religion. They came down from Jerusalem not because Capernaum was south of Jerusalem, but because Jerusalem is higher. And if you travel anywhere in that area you came *down* from Jerusalem. Not only that, when you came down from Jerusalem, you came with authority. Here is an official delegation coming because Jesus' reputation has been expanding because of His miracles. You have people astounded that demons are being cast out and that reputation has made it all the way up to Jerusalem. So the high important people have come down with an official statement. Look at the statement in verse 22. *22 And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "by the prince of demons he casts out the demons."* So the first thing you have got to do is find out who is Beelzebul? So I tracked it down through all kind of commentaries and there really are no real consistencies. Sometimes it's translated as Lord of the Manor or Lord of a house. Most of the time it is understood to be Lord of the Flies. If you press further it means Lord of the kind of flies that are around a carcass. If a possum gets hit in the road, and it lays there a day or so in the sun, the flies start to swarm around the dead body.

Take that gross scene and bring it over here. This is what it describes. They are saying, this is what you're the Lord of. What you're doing is demonic. You're the Lord of rotten things. I mean, here's Jesus, the supreme good Jesus, who is healing and casting out demons. This is Jesus who is teaching but He is now being called Lord of the Flies. The scribes are looking at something that is supremely good and called it supremely demonic. That's the

confusion there. It's the confusion in 2023. We've come up into a society that has now taken what we view as supremely good and called it supremely evil. For instance, we would hearken our faith back to Genesis chapters 1 and 2, and there we find God creating all things, including you, and He is creating us male and female and saying that is good. And we cherish that as a Biblical truth that has been borne out in all of nature. And yet, if you declare that there are only two sexes, male and female, you will be called Beelzebul. What is supremely good has been called supremely evil.

Next week is Mother's Day. What a great thing to do is to set aside a weekend to celebrate the goodness of mothers. But look, even motherhood is taking a beating in the world we live in. Instead of saying there's supreme value in the great love of a mother or value in the masculinity of a man who loves his family and provides leadership and defense, it is seen as rottenness. We stand and say it's wrong for a man to dress up like a woman and go to a library and read to children. We say that is wrong and us saying that is seen as rottenness.

Let me go on record and say that I would consider our church welcoming and affirming. We welcome anyone who wants to come to church. Please come here. What we affirm is the dignity. You've been created in the image of God. We affirm that you have great dignity and we respect you. We also affirm that we are all sinners in need of the grace of God found in Jesus. There's no sin greater than the other. We all run to the cross of Jesus, where He died for our sins. And the affirmation is that if you put your faith in Christ, He'll save you and change you. It's the Gospel that's lifted up. That is what Jesus is doing in the text in the confusion. Even now, there's a confusion in the understanding of grace. What does it mean to show grace? Grace is telling the truth, pointing to Jesus and loving people. That's the confusion of grace. Let's talk about the logic. Let me show you another thing you'll notice here.

The logic of grace is assuring

There is some assurance to what Jesus says in verses 23 - 26. There's a logic to it. Notice what the text says in verse 23. ²³ *And he called them to him and said to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? That's the first time in the book of Mark you find the word "parables." What He is getting ready to say is not a parable in the classic sense. It is really more like a proverbial saying. And He'll say it in three different ways. Let's go through verses 24 - 25. ²⁴ If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵ And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. That doesn't make any sense, Jesus says. If a Kingdom is divided against itself, that Kingdom cannot stand. OK, If you don't get that, let's talk about something else. If a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. ²⁶ And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end.*

So you get the point. Connie and I lived in Alabama where college sports is really big, especially football. You've got Alabama and Auburn and we were given equal shirts and hats from both Alabama and Auburn fans. And they said, you need to pick one. Now one person gave me a hat that had it split down the middle, Alabama and Auburn because I said I would prefer to remain neutral in this dispute. But they said, you cannot. You have to have one or the other. You cannot be a house divided. All of us understand this principle. It's true at home. You can't live in a home where mom and dad are at odds with one another. You can't have a Kingdom that is divided. So you wonder how long the United States will last as it is right now with so much division because of this principle.

Jesus is saying what you're talking about is illogical. You can't be on a team where the team is divided. You can't be in a church where there's not some cohesion. We have the Apostles' Creed that holds us and is in our statement of faith that says: this is what we believe. There's a certain logic to it. And really, what Jesus is doing is showing them the absurdity of what they are saying. What they are saying is absurd. Here's Jesus exposing the absurdity of sin. Here is His argument. In the context He's cast out demons and provided

healing up to this point in Chapter 3. And this is what He says to them: I have just cast out demons so now if Satan is doing that, then Satan is working against himself, which is absurd.

We live in a world where what is absurd is being pressed on us as the truth. When you're steeped in sin and you're lost in sin and you're covered in sin, and your eyes are covered in sin, you believe the absurd. When you are blinded by sin, when you check the news and CNN comes up and you see a picture of a man in a bathing suit and they say, yes, that's a woman. For those of you that like MMA and fighting. I don't watch that. It's too gruesome for me. Boxing was bad enough but MMA seems like a gladiator. It looks too gruesome. But you can watch MMA and if you see a man who presents himself as a woman beat up another woman and say that's okay, then your eyes have been covered. Sin makes you believe absurd things. They're saying to Jesus, "Hey, you're casting out Satan by Satan." And Jesus says, wake up, that doesn't make any sense. He's going to teach us the grace of God and say the grace of God is good. A good God has called out to sinful people and provided a way to know Him through Jesus Christ. In verse 22 you find that confusion. The confusion of grace. It's growing with every verse, Verse 23-26 is the parable and Jesus teaches us there that the logic of grace is assuring, while sin is absurd. Grace is assuring. It assures us that even though we are sinners, we are saved by His grace through faith in Jesus. So we're talking about grace. Let's go to the strength of grace. I want you to see that...

The strength of grace is uplifting

It's uplifting. In verse 27 Jesus tells us another parable. This time it actually is a parable. Let me just read it and kind of give some comment as we go verse 27. *27 But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house.*

The strong man He's talking about is Satan, and the one entering is Jesus. The goods of the strong man are those people who have been duped by sin and are held captive by Satan. No one can enter the strong man's house and

plunder his goods unless Jesus first binds the strongman, Satan. And then when Satan is bound, he can plunder his house. We live in a world where Satan has taken people captive to his will. Paul tells us in 2 Timothy that Satan has taken people captive. He tells us in 2nd Corinthians 4-5 that Satan has covered the eyes of people so they can't see. Jesus has come in this passage, and one of the first things He does, it seems so weird to us, He comes in not only healing, but casting out demons. You see Jesus' presence forcing out demons. It is an open and tangible display of His assault on the Lordship of Satan in this world. And verse 27 gives us this picture of the strongman, Satan, being bound up. And the way that he is bound up, will be at the Cross of Jesus. Verse 27 says that no one can enter the strong man's house—that's Satan's house— and plunder his goods. Satan's goods are people who are in sin, he has them captive.

And you say, well, if they're held captive by Satan, how is it their fault? You wouldn't blame someone who's kidnapped and held captive. But what happens is that often in our own sin, we develop something called Stockholm syndrome. The Stockholm syndrome is when you develop a kinship with the one who's holding you captive, who actually is your enemy. But because you're so close to that one who is your enemy, you develop some sort of connection and even affection for the one who's holding you captive. And often people who are so steeped in sin will develop an affection for that sin and the one holding them, who is Satan. Satan gives you food and drink and you take that even though you know that it's poison. You've developed such an affection for this condition in the Stockholm syndrome that you stay there and drink it.

And this parable says, Jesus sees you in that condition. But nobody can beat the strongman. Nobody dares to go near his house. Jesus on His mission says, "I'll go to that house." Here's the original recon. Jesus goes into that house and does what nobody else can do. He binds the strong man and brings you to your senses. You see that? It's poison that is spit out. And faith is you looking to Jesus as your rescuer. Jesus is going to the cross to save you.

Jesus comes and He rescues. How does He do it? By the power of the spirit. You see, when you read Mark Chapter 1-3, you hear Him talk about the Holy Spirit. When He's baptized, everything He does is by the Holy Spirit. How does He save you out of that sin? How do you believe? Is it something you know? The Holy Spirit gives you eyes to see. The spirit moves and you see the poison for what it is, and you spit it out and you turn to Jesus, the bread of life and you believe! See the power there. There's great assurance there. But not just that. Keep reading. Now we've talked about the power. Let's go to verse 28 and look at the scope.

The scope of grace is astounding

When you read that sometimes you read too fast and we get through it too quickly. When you read that, it ought to make you stop. Let me see what it says in verse 28. ²⁸ *"Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, if you are reading it in Greek, "truly" translates to "Amen." If you're Baptist preacher, you want your amen's on the back end of what you say, not the front end. If you're Jesus, you put them on the front end. When you say something and somebody says "Amen," it means, "I agree with that. Yes, Sir. That's the truth." Jesus starts it off by saying, "what I'm getting ready to tell you is the absolute truth." You'll see a lot of times in the Bible, "Truly, truly, I say to you." This is the first time you see it in the book of Mark. Jesus says, "Amen. I'm going to say something that is authoritative and far-reaching." What does he say? ²⁸ *"Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, All. Circle that. All sins will be forgiven the children of man. Whatever they have done, whatever debauched things they can come up with to do, all sins will be forgiven the children of man. Whatever blasphemies they are speaking, something terribly offensive about God or to God, whatever blasphemies they have said to God, whatever they've uttered, all sins will be forgiven.**

Think of what Jesus is doing now. All sins will be forgiven. All the terrible things you've said. So I started thinking, well, what about this? This is our

condition. When I hear "all sins are forgiven." What about we go into "what about ism's?" Let me just save you some of the "what about ism's." If I started going OK, what about the terrible king Manasseh? He was a terrible king in 2nd Kings and 2nd Chronicles. I mean, he was so bad he sacrificed his own children, burnt them up in the fire. Who could forgive that? You go read that story and Manasseh is saved. He puts his faith in God.

What about David in the Old Testament? The terrible, outlandish adultery, murder and deception. He was forgiven by God. What about the Apostle Paul who wrote so much of the New Testament? The Apostle Paul was probably a murderer of Christians. He certainly was a persecutor of the church. He hated the God of the New Testament. And yet God saved him. What about Peter? Peter and his famous denials, his outright arrogance and complete betrayal. What about John Newton? What about those terrible sins he committed but was saved by Amazing Grace. Whatever it is, list them. List them and in verse 28, Jesus says ALL. ²⁸ *"Truly, I say to you, all.* Look right here, friend. Here's the power and the scope and the eternally valid promise of the gospel.

When I say Gospel, I mean the substitutionary atonement of Jesus in your place. The Gospel is that God is holy and we are sinners in a terrible spot. We are condemned to Hell. But God and His goodness has given us Jesus Christ. He lived perfectly and died on the cross, taking the wrath of God away. The judgment for your sin is on Jesus. He is not judging you. If you're going through a hard time, that is His discipline. Any good father disciplines His child. The judgment of God is falling on Jesus. He took that away and now when you put your faith in Christ, what happens is, by the spirit, you are adopted as a son or daughter of God. The scope of it is astounding. But it doesn't end there, does it? There's a boundary. I hate to end like this, but we have to end like the Bible does. Number 5. I want you to see...

The boundary of Grace is terrifying

Verse 29 is a haunting verse and is a contrast to verse 28. So verse 28 has this beautiful "all sins regardless of what they've said, all sins will be forgiven." But

look at the contrast in verse 29. But all sins are forgiven in verse 28, but there is one holding back. There's a boundary. ²⁹ *but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin*— ³⁰ *for they were saying, "He has an unclean spirit."*

Whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness but is guilty of an eternal sin. And then there is the reason in verse 30. They were saying that Jesus has an unclean spirit. So what you have here is what has been known as the "unpardonable sin, or the unforgivable sin." Neither one of those phrases are found in the Bible. It's better to use the "eternal sin," the phrase that Jesus has used here. That sin is blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. Why is that such a sin? Why the unforgiveness? Jesus says in Matthew 12, not in this life or in the one to come. Why? Blasphemy is speaking ugly, nasty, terrible things of the Holy Spirit. Because only through the work of the Holy Spirit are you able to have saving faith. How did you come to faith in Jesus? It was the work of the Holy Spirit in you. To blaspheme the Holy Spirit means to talk against the Holy Spirit, who is seeking to lead you to Christ. To blaspheme that is unforgivable. To say you don't want that is to make faith impossible. Without the Holy Spirit, you can't have faith. Be careful how you talk about the unforgivable sin. People have wondered, is this suicide? It is not. There are murderers, divorcees, abortionists, are they the unforgivable sin? I refer you to verse 28. Jesus says, "all sins are forgiven."

But there is one. By the way, if you're worried if you have committed the unforgivable sin, if you are worried about that, then you have not committed it. Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is not taking the Lord's name in vain. You can be cussing like a sailor. Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is a sin of knowledge. This is not just rejection of Christ. All of us, before we were saved, have rejected Christ. This is not just a rejection of Christ. This is someone who has a very clear knowledge of who Christ is and of how the Holy Spirit works in the Christian faith and then having that knowledge with a willful rejection of the facts about Christ that are known to be true, and then attributing those things, the work of the Holy Spirit, to Satan. That's what verse 30 says. Mark

tells us the reason Jesus said this is because they kept saying what He was doing was Satan's work. This is what John, in 1 John 5:16, will say. He will call this "the sin unto death." This is Hebrews Chapters 5 and 6. This is the apostasy falling away. This is the sin that Christians cannot commit. Those who've committed this sin don't care. They never turn back. They're not worried about committing this sin because they don't care. And the separation in verse 29 is astounding because it's one of those clear passages in the Bible that talks about the eternal separation. The separation in verse 29 is horrifying. There is never forgiveness. Do you see the wording in verse 29? It never has forgiveness. The guilt of eternal sin remains forever and ever and ever. This gives us one of the clearest pictures in the Bible that there is of unforgivable sin.

But don't forget, now. Don't forget what the Apostle Paul said to all the believers in Philippians 1:6. Paul said, *⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.* You see the power of God, and the power of God's grace is found in Jesus. Here are the two types of people in this room. One type is you're a Christian, and this resonates with you. It strengthens your heart and you're thinking of someone you want to pray for. Others of you, today, you've been awakened. You've been awakened to your need for Christ. Come and put your faith in Jesus and receive the joy and forgiveness found in verse 28 and run away from the terror found in verse 29. Come and put your faith in the crucified, resurrected Jesus.

(Pastor prays)