

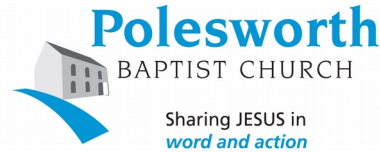
repent, for repentance is turning to God and turning away from Satan. And if you can't repent, you can't be forgiven.

Many people have attacked, by conscious or unconscious action, the Son of man and yet seen the errors of their ways and repented and been forgiven. But to see what God is doing and to attack his Spirit leads into the death zone of no repentance. It's not that God withholds forgiveness, but that forgiveness is never sought.

So if you worry that you may have committed this unforgivable sin the test of your doing so is quite simple. Turn to God, and ask for His forgiveness. Not with cheap words, but with heart felt sorrow and a true desire to be forgiven by God. If you can do that, you have not fallen into this unforgivable sin; rejoice and be glad, confess and return to the Lord, and walk thereafter in the Holy Spirit, living in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, seeking always to do what pleases God. Rejoice, as Paul writes in Philippians 4:4-9 and the God peace will be with you.

Praise the Lord. Amen.

NB the words said in the sermon preached and here written may vary.



Reflections 7th March 2021

**[1] Matthew 12:9-21 Jesus gives life.
What do His enemies give?**

Here is an action of God's mercy. And what better day to do it than on the Sabbath and what better place than in the synagogue.

But the Pharisees have devised some rules to protect people from working on the Sabbath, to avoid breaking the 5th of the 10 commandments: Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore God banned it as a working day, making it a work free day so the people could be refreshed by Him.

So, comes a reasonable question: what work are we to avoid? This led to rules to protect the Sabbath. The Pharisees know these rules and so they ask Jesus: Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath? The Pharisees are like today's clever TV interviewers, asking politicians questions designed to uncover contradictions and U-turns. The Pharisees say to themselves: this man claims to fulfil the law. We'll catch Him out; we'll show that, by actions or by word, He is breaking the Law. And then the people will turn away from him. So, Jesus is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?

But Jesus isn't fazed. He answers their question with His own. If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? Jesus is not here appealing to rules but to common practice. If you were in the synagogue, and your sheep fell into a pit, what would you do? Jesus sides with common reality – kindness and/or the risk of losing the sheep, would lead you to rescue. So Jesus says to them: How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! His conclusion takes them and us back to His earlier words: Go and learn what this means: I desire mercy and not sacrifice.' Words He said in c9 as regards eating with sinners and words just repeated in c12, with the added comment: If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice' you would not have condemned the innocent. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.'

Jesus is not breaking the Law but fulfilling it. And more than that He is the One who made and therefore regulates the Sabbath.

Having been so rebutted, what do the Pharisees do? They went out and plotted how to kill Him. Doesn't that want to make you weep?

They who refer so much to the Law and the Prophets cannot see as Matthew goes on to tell us Jesus is fulfilling what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah. He is the promised servant. He is the One in whom God delights. He is the One on whom God has put His Spirit. The Pharisees were meant to welcome Him as the promised hope of Israel, but instead they plot to kill him. And so of course fulfil the prophecy: in His name the nations put their hope. Jesus gives life. But from that synagogue in Galilee to North Korea today, what do His enemies do?

Matthew 12:22-28 Reflection: [2] A kingdom divided

What does Jesus mean? The Romans had a political tactic: divide and rule. It's still true today. Divided nations are easy prey for their enemies. What is so in the political is also in the spiritual. Do we grasp how this applies to God and us?

Firstly it's a foundation principle. In Jesus Christ God's Kingdom or rule is united with us. There is no division within Jesus between His being God with God and Man with Man. Jesus is inseparably both. He unites God with us and us with God.

This was how we were meant to be but the devil divided us from God. Listening to Satan and not to God we fell: out of God's presence, out of God's life, out into the cruel welcome of the devil's domain, with all its darkness and death. But Jesus, God with us came to rescue us and bring us home to God. To say, as the Pharisees said that Jesus heals by allegiance with the devil is to smear Him in order to reject Him, an accusation of deceit, a slander straight out of the devil's great big book of lies.

Secondly, all who believe in Christ are fallen but yet are raised up, no longer everyday people, but God's children, His chosen, holy, royal, special possession. That is what it is to be a church.

This is our high and noble calling, for we are adopted princes and princesses in the Kingdom of God. Yet Christians and churches are always being tempted to do a Meghan and a Harry, living in our royal blessings but walking away from our royal calling. Kingdom children seeking worldly acceptance by separating ourselves from what the world sees as God's problem aspects.

As Christian's we are called to a new view of humanity. No longer are we to see a simplistic brotherhood or sisterhood of all people. Rather our sight now sees that while everyone lives under God's creative power not everyone is one of His children. They are, as we were before we were rescued, prisoners in the custody of the devil, alive but doomed to perish, Like the man who leapt from the top of the Empire State building, saying as he goes downward it's okay so far.

Of course it's much easier to be divided than united. That fact is the essence of every soap opera in media land. But what do you get more blessing from even in the world, achieving something that's easy-peasy or succeeding at something that's really difficult? Which was easier for the disciples to do the night Jesus was betrayed, to run away or to stand with Him? Which is easier the walk down the broad way of my way, or the narrow way? Yet which is the way of life and of a faith that is proved more genuine than gold?

Christ calls us each and all called to support, and to encourage and to try to excel in the gifts that build up the church, and in so doing to make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. Brothers and sisters in Christ let us renew our togetherness in this by setting out in a pilgrimage of prayer for kingdom unity, with God, with each other, with other churches, with other people.

Matthew 12:29-32 Reflection: [3] No forgiveness?

And so we come to Jesus' words which are so often a worry to so many. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven but anyone who speaks a word against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

Why does Jesus say this? Remember what we know from the Gospel, and what Matthew has just told us. Jesus, the Son of God, is empowered to God's work through the living presence of the Holy Spirit. But the Pharisees far from seeing that say that what Jesus is doing is not by the Holy Spirit but by Satan.

To say that is to reveal that the Pharisees don't know the God they claim to serve. When you cant tell the difference between the work of the Spirit and the work of Satan you cant tell the difference between what is right before God and what is wrong. And when you cant tell the difference between the righteousness of God and the wrongness of Satan you cant