

God's Mercy Doesn't Break

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Mark 3:20-30 ²⁰ Then the multitude came together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread. ²¹ But when His own people heard *about this*, they went out to lay hold of Him, for they said, "He is out of His mind." ²² And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, "He has Beelzebub," and, "By the ruler of the demons He casts out demons." ²³ So He called them to *Himself* 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 cannot stand. ²⁶ "And if Satan has risen up against himself, and is divided, he cannot stand, but has an end. ²⁷ "No one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. And then he will plunder his house. ²⁸ "Assuredly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they may utter; ²⁹ "but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation "-- ³⁰ because they said, "He has an unclean spirit."

How far can your kids stretch your patience before it breaks? Imagine your child standing there with a plastic bat tapping it against your head, dad, dad, dad, dad . . . How long until you lose patience?

Our text today talks about God's patience. Jesus warns us just how far God's patience will last. His answer is surprising both in terms of what God will forgive and in terms of what he will not.

What will he forgive?

Jesus says, "any sin will be forgiven."

With these words Jesus includes sins like murder, idolatry, fornication, adultery, theft, treason, and even blasphemy. All of these will be forgiven, to those who repent and ask for forgiveness. It's quite surprising to us just how far God's patience and forgiveness will stretch.

Lamentations 3:22 reminds us "**The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end.**"

God demonstrated this never-ending patience through the forty years the Israelites wandered in the wilderness, the 500 years of the judges, the 500 years of the kings of Israel. After all that the scribes coming and calling him a demon and a servant of Satan, that's really nothing to Jesus. I'll forgive even that Jesus says.

It's quite incredible just how far Jesus' mercy and forgiveness goes. We think back on all the sins of our life, and we know that God has forgiven them all.

There was once a time when David had to choose between punishments. One option was that his enemies would win all battles. Another option was that the Angel of the Lord would strike down the people of Israel. David chose to be attacked by the angel of the Lord, because he said he would trust in the Lord's mercy.

2Sa 24:14 "And David said to Gad, 'I am in great distress. Please let us fall into the hand of the LORD, for His mercies are great; but do not let me fall into the hand of man.'"

David encourages us to put our trust in the Lord because his mercy stretches so far.

Psalm 130:7 "O Israel, hope in the LORD; For with the LORD there is mercy, And with Him is abundant redemption."

How far does God's mercy stretch? It can forgive anything.

What then will he not forgive? All sin will be forgiven except the sin against the Holy Spirit.

Just as surprising as what the Lord will forgive, is the one sin Jesus says will not be forgiven. The refusal to receive the Holy Spirit. If we were going to pick one sin where the Lord would draw the line, we would probably pick murder or treason, but instead the Lord says "those who will not listen to the Holy Spirit." That seems to us like a pretty little thing for God to refuse to forgive. However, let us look at the text again.

It is important to notice that Jesus does not say that he who blasphemes the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, rather he says such a person "never has forgiveness." That is to say such a person has rejected God's mercy and forgiveness and therefore they have no hope. The problem is not that God's mercy and patience has failed but that such a person has rejected God's mercy and forgiveness. Its not that God won't forgive this sin, the problem is this individual won't accept God's mercy.

In the explanation to the 3rd article Luther writes "In this Christian church God daily and richly forgives all sins to me and all believers."

Luther explains that this daily act of forgiveness takes place in the realm of his church. His mercy and his forgiveness are given to those who are his sheep. If one steps outside of the church through the rejection of the Holy Spirit, he no longer receives these blessings and has no forgiveness.

This act of daily forgiveness is clearly described in scripture as a work of the Holy Spirit.

This is why Paul says in Eph 4:30 "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption."

Paul also says in Titus 3:5 "according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,"

Therefore, he who rejects the Holy Spirit, rejects the mercy of God, and without the mercy of God there is no forgiveness. God's mercy never fails but without God's mercy there is no hope. Without the Holy Spirit there is no daily forgiveness.

King David knew very well the hopelessness of someone who rejected God's mercy. He saw first-hand what happened to King Saul. King Saul sinned against God, but more importantly when God reminded Saul of his sin, Saul would lie and make excuses. He would not repent and trust in God's mercy. Without God's mercy the situation became so hopeless that Saul eventually tried going to a witch.

Knowing what happened to Saul and not wishing to end like him, David pleads in the fifty first psalm.

Psalm 51:11 "do not take Your Holy Spirit from me."

The same thing happens to many people these days. They want to be free of God but without God's mercy they are lost and without hope. Many seek hope and meaning in paganism, nature worship and witchcraft. Others look to social justice and similar causes. But without God's mercy the situation is hopeless.

God's mercy comes through his Holy Spirit working through his word and sacraments. He who rejects the Holy Spirit has no mercy. Just as someone who cuts the electric wire running to his house has no power. This is why Jesus says that whoever blasphemes the holy spirit "never has forgiveness."

God's mercy stretches to all sins. There is no sin that he will not forgive, but those who reject the Holy Spirit do not have the mercy of God and therefore do not have forgiveness.

The big question then is are you rejecting the Holy Spirit and God's mercy?

On the one hand if you are worried about it than you probably haven't hardened your heart against God to the point where you have rejected God's grace and his Holy Spirit. Those who have rejected the Holy Spirit tend not to care what God says. They react the way the Jews reacted to Stephen.

Stephen just before he was martyred warned the Jews that they had hardened their hearts.

Act 7:51 "You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you."

They proceeded to put their hands over the ears and stone Stephen to death. They weren't remotely interested in listening to what the Holy Spirit was saying through Stephen. They weren't worried about hardening their hearts against the Holy Spirit.

But more importantly if you are worried about it, then simply repent of your sins and trust in Jesus for that never ending forgiveness. To reject the Holy Spirit is to refuse to repent. To repent is not to reject the Holy Spirit. He who trusts in Jesus' mercy has forgiveness and have passed from death to life.

God's mercy stretches a long way. In fact, it never ends. His patience never runs out. However, those who reject his mercy have no hope. Don't reject God's mercy but trust in his forgiveness. Amen.