



# SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau  
April 22, 2018  
A Hard Day's Night (Hope Restored Series)  
Pastor Dan Chun

**G**olly, why do I always assign myself the hard passages as we are walking through the Gospel of Mark in our series of Hope Restored? And since we are going through the Gospel of Mark verse by verse, here we are. Today we are going to touch on a tough subject: What is the unforgivable sin that even Jesus can't let get by?

In today's Bible reading, which we will hear shortly, Jesus in essence says to us all, "You have a choice of how you will live your life. But choose wisely, for if you choose poorly, it will condemn you forever. It will be one UNFORGIVABLE sin that even God will not forgive.

Do I have your attention now? It sounds scary, doesn't it? But I'm not talking about it to terrify you, but rather to make it clear what it is. I'm not talking about your sin of once stealing candy, or getting a driving ticket, or lying, or even murder or adultery. No, it's something bigger. It involves choosing wisely or poorly on a decision that has eternal consequences.

The reading for today follows the passage that Chris preached on last week. We will hear again last week's passage again plus a few additional verses.

As many of you know, we offer a public Bible reading class called *Just Show Up*, where we read and listen to audio recorded readings of the Bible for about 30 minutes and then we discuss the Scripture passage. No prior homework. Just show up and listen! The class has ended, but we will offer it again soon on

Sunday mornings and during WAKO (or Wednesdays at Ko'olau classes).

To give us a feel for that class, today we will hear from an audio Bible version of the Today's New International Version that is called *The Bible Experience*. The entire cast is African American. This has become my new favorite audio Bible version that our church will now start using. It features actors like Denzel Washington, Blair Underwood as Jesus, Angela Basset as an angel, Forrest Whitaker as Moses, Cuba Gooding Jr. as Judas Iscariot, and Samuel L. Jackson as God to name a few. And that's no pulp fiction.

*Mark 3:20 Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat.*

*Mark 3:21 When His family heard about this, they went to take charge of Him, for they said, "He is out of his mind."*

*Mark 3:22 And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, "He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons He is driving out demons."*

*Mark 3:23 So Jesus called them over to Him and began to speak to them in parables: "How can Satan drive out Satan?"*

*Mark 3:24 If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand.*

*Mark 3:25 If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand.*

*Mark 3:26 And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come.*

*Mark 3:27 In fact, no one can enter a strong man's house without first tying him up. Then he can plunder the strong man's house.*

*Mark 3:28 Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven all their sins and all the blasphemies they utter.*

*Mark 3:29 But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven but is guilty of an eternal sin."*

*Mark 3:30 He said this because they were saying, "He has an evil spirit."*

Through this passage, Jesus tells us in essence that you have a choice of how you will live your life. But choose wisely, for if you choose poorly, it will condemn you forever.

This reminds me of a scene in the movie *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, where explorer Indiana Jones meets an ancient supernatural knight who is guarding the Holy Grail, the actual cup that Jesus used in the Last Supper. With Indiana are two Nazi sympathizers who also want the Holy Grail. The thing is the Holy Grail is in a room full of many fake grails, and the deal is if anyone chooses the wrong grail and drinks from it, that person will die.

One of the Nazi sympathizers asks the ancient knight, "Which one is it?" But the knight won't tell him and instead says, "You must choose, but choose wisely for while the true Grail will bring you [eternal] life, the false Grail will take it from you." The Nazi character picks up a cup and drinks from it but he has chosen the wrong one! Instantly his hair grows and then falls off and he dissolves into a skeleton and then into dust! And the knight says, "He chose poorly."

Today's Bible passage is saying choose wisely for it will be a tremendous blessing, for if you choose poorly. It will condemn you forever. And this is real life, not a movie.

As we have learned that the word Gospel means Good News. But Good news is only good news if there is bad news. The bad news is there's an unforgivable sin. But the good news is Jesus can save us from committing it. Before we go too far, let's define the unforgivable sin:

*"Deliberately resisting the Holy Spirit's witness and invitation to turn to and follow Jesus. It becomes unpardonable when the person dies because death will end all his/her chances to accept Jesus."*

Jesus is trying to make things really clear for us. There is an unforgivable sin that if you choose to commit, you will be in deep *kim chee*, a deep river of trouble. See the whole thing about pardons is that it's a legal term. People may not understand it. When you get a pardon, it doesn't mean you have not sinned. It doesn't mean you're innocent. The pardon says that you are guilty, but even though you DID sin and ARE sinning, you won't have to pay the price. All penalties or punishments are eliminated, and you can't be prosecuted.

It's like what happened to President Nixon and others (1972 Watergate scandal). They were pardoned but they are still guilty. They still did something wrong. However, you are only pardoned,

if you accept the pardon. If you don't, you are penalized.

For us today, Jesus pardons us for our sin. It doesn't mean we haven't committed sins. It's just if we follow Him and accept Him, His forgiveness then we are pardoned for our sins. We're still sinners, but we don't have to pay the penalty of eternal separation from Him. So if we reject Jesus' pardon, then we pay horribly in this life and the next.

But when Jesus said this in our Bible passage, was He yelling at people like "Hey, you sinners! You blaspheme the Holy Spirit, and you are going to go to hell! I am gonna tell your momma and everyone in town? I am so going to embarrass you!"

Did He say it with anger and hate or with great retribution? Or is He saying it in a different way? Notice in the audio Bible we played, Jesus was not yelling. How we hear Jesus's words makes all the difference in the world. Often when we read the words of Jesus we think He is shouting at us; He is saying we are doomed. But is He? Is even the context of how He is warning us not to blaspheme the Holy Spirit being said in a kind way, or in an angry way of if you mess up I am going to hate you!

Stay with me on this. This is an important principle on how we think Jesus talks to us...and how He warns us. As a teaching tool, I go now to the Beatles! Yes, the arguably the best rock and roll group of all time. I want you to listen to this. It all matters in the tone of how words are said. To demonstrate, here is a short, ancient, mushy video clip of *The Beatles* singing 50 years ago their famous song, "A Hard Day's Night." (Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lySmwmUPwk0&t=61s>)

But what if those same lyrics were not in the rock-and-roll genre? What if they were said in a Shakespearean play of *King Richard III*? Hear how it sounds differently with the late great comedic, three-time Academy Award nominee Sir

Peter Sellers as Richard III, in another ancient, mushy video clip. (Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zLEMncv140s>)

It all depends on how the words are said. So, on one hand while we can hear the words of Jesus that if we blaspheme the Holy Spirit that can seem like Jesus is trying to literally scare the hell out of us; or I contend that when Jesus says the words in the passage, He is trying to just plainly, practically tell us what we need to do to live a fulfilled, great, meaningful, peaceful life right now here on earth and to have a chance of going to the eternal loving heaven.

It's like a matter of fact advice when someone says, "If you want to go to China, you need to get a VISA." No way around it. You must apply for a VISA and pay a fee, and fill out the forms, or you don't go to China. No visa, no trip. You won't get to your destination. Jesus is saying, "You must have the Holy Spirit in you to get to heaven and to have an abundant life here on earth. The Holy Spirit is your visa. You need to live a life led by the Holy Spirit, who is given to you when you commit your life to Jesus."

When we do communion on a regular basis, we get to the part of the sacrament where we hear that Jesus is telling us to drink the cup.

I have told you that the wine in the cup represents the blood of Jesus shed for us. Because of His sacrifice on the cross our sins are forgiven. And because our sins have been erased, we can go to heaven because in heaven there can be no sin in the presence of God.

The Apostle Paul knew this and wrote about it, in one of his letters to one of the first Christian churches in ancient Corinth in first century A.D.:

*1Cor. 11:25 In the same way, after supper Jesus took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."*

Jesus is **not** saying be a cannibal and drink my blood, but He is saying that when you drink the cup during communion, do it in remembrance of what I have done for you on the cross. Then you will, in essence, have my blood type in you, which you will need for heaven. My blood is the visa. It is the passport you need in your spiritual body to exist in heaven.

Last week we had a blood drive. It is important to give blood because when people are injured or have certain diseases like cancer, leukemia they need blood transfusions. BUT they can only have the same type of blood put in them or at least a compatible one, or else they will die. They must have a very specific blood for a blood infusion or transfusion or they die. Those are not words of hate but words of practical direction.

Jesus is saying, "You have to have My blood in you. You need a transfusion in this world with my blood, which is the Holy Spirit. That is what you need for eternal life. Any other transfusion from this world won't get you to heaven."

Now the context for today's passage as we heard last week from Chris is that the Pharisees, these legalistic lawmakers who hated and hounded Jesus said that He was actually possessed by the prince of demons as He drove out demons from people. Jesus said that makes no sense. How can Satan drive out Satan? A kingdom divided against itself can't stand.

Jesus can handle stupidity. He can handle legalism. He can handle criticism. But if anyone is saying that Jesus is not God, that He's irrelevant to this world, if anyone is rejecting the messages of the Holy Spirit who is telling us daily that Jesus is God, then that is utter blasphemy. Jesus is saying that is the one sin that can't be forgiven.

Jesus is leading a life led by the Holy Spirit. And if you don't want to be led by the Holy Spirit and if you don't believe Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit, or worse

yet demonic, then that is blasphemy. As the apostle Paul wrote.

*1Cor. 10:21 You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons.*

Pastor Tim Keller said it helps to think of this as external sins versus internal sins. By external sins Keller means the sins we do outside of our body, like cheating, stealing, hitting. God forgives all external sins. We shouldn't do them but God will forgive.

But internally, if we constantly push Jesus away, if we constantly not want to talk to Him, hear Him, resist His love, and on the day of our death we are still in that state, if the love of God is not in our hearts, or we want to keep God out of our lives, then it really is time's up in a different way. Then we have chosen not to have God's visa or His blood type. What does it say in our Bible passage?

*Mark 3:28 Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven all their sins and all the blasphemies they utter.*

Those are the external sins. But then Jesus addresses the internal sin:

*Mark 3:29 But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven but is guilty of an eternal sin."*

It's that internal sin that leads to an eternal sin. It's the internal sin that has the attitude that I will resist in every way possible the love of God. I will resist the Holy Spirit who is God who is always trying to woo us, convince us, compel us, attract us, comfort us, counsel us, and love us towards God.

The Holy Spirit might talk to us in our conscience. He might make us unhappy that we are rude or selfish or greedy. It's the Spirit's voice that is saying, "You need to forgive. You need to receive forgiveness. You need to admit you need help. You need to start a journey of trusting God."

I am listening to an audio book of a book called *Just Mercy*, which is about the life of Bryan Stevenson, an Alabama lawyer who helps prisoners on death row (and who I hope he will speak at the HIM Conference next year).

Bryan Stevenson helps convicted murderers, who are falsely or unfairly convicted or accused of murder, to be freed from prison. As a Christian, Bryan Stevenson is trying to bring the mercy of Jesus to them. He is like Jesus who loves the convicts no matter what they may have done (embezzlement, murder, adultery, lying). Bryan can only free them from a death sentence if they accept his help. He doesn't accept the money. His gift of legal services is free. He will pay the price of love. But he can only save them if they accept his gift of legal services.

Jesus went to the cross to pay the price of our sin so that we would be pardoned, but we have to accept Him and His gift of service to be free. If Bryan Stevenson gets a pardon for a man on death row but the man rejects the pardon, then he is executed. You have to accept the pardon to be saved.

Same for us. If you reject what Jesus has done, if you live a life of continually resisting Him, there will come a time when Jesus says to you in this life or the next, "If you choose not to live a life led by me and the Holy Spirit – then that is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, an unforgivable eternal sin."

It's the Holy Spirit that makes us want to change. It's the Holy Spirit that moves us towards humility and to accept Jesus' pardon. It's the Holy Spirit that moves us towards forgiveness. It's an attitude that the Spirit hopes we will accept that says, "I know I am not perfect. I know I will fail. I know I am a sinner, but my heart is that I want to learn to be led by the Holy Spirit, to hear God's voice, to read God's Words, to do what He tells me to do."

If that is our attitude, to accept the pardon and follow God the Father, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit then all will be pardoned.

I know this can be confusing because we can get paranoid or anxious or stressed out thinking, "Oh no, I did not forgive my neighbor the other day. I am stingy with my money. I haven't evangelized anyone in the last ten years. I haven't read the Bible for ages. Have I blasphemed?"

I am not talking about external actions. I am talking about a deep internal motivation to try as human and failed as I am to try to lead a life led by Jesus and the Holy Spirit and to accept His pardon for our sins. If we don't accept His pardon then we pay an eternal penalty.

And the worst is like when the legalistic Pharisees claimed that Jesus was actually being led by the devil. If our perception is that God is evil when He is actually trying to help us for our good, it means trouble.

Now for us all, I get it if this whole topic is hard on first hearing. So, let me share some final thoughts that might be helpful. First, N.T. Wright, who is an Anglican Bishop in England and author, wrote this:

"Once you label what is in fact the work of the Holy Spirit as the work of the devil, there's no way back. It's like holding a conspiracy theory: all the evidence you see will simply confirm your belief. You will be blind to the truth. It isn't that God gets especially angry with one sin in particular. It's rather that if you decide firmly that the doctor who is offering to perform a life-saving operation on you is in fact a sadistic murderer, you will never give your consent to the operation."

A spirit-led life makes us realize that God is not evil. He offers us a future and a hope. And we desperately need help.

When we are followers of Jesus our humility should grow. We should realize that we really need help; we are not perfect. The more we know, the more we

realize that we do not know everything. We need as much of Jesus and the Holy Spirit in us as possible. It's the Holy Spirit, who enter into us when we accept Jesus Christ, who will bring us all the fruit of the Spirit that He wants to bloom and flourish in our lives now as the Bible lists them as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

If we choose a life to resist the Holy Spirit, then our life here on earth and in the after life will be a Hard Day's Night. And you will be working like a dog; it will be a hard day's night. You will be so exhausted eating the bread of anxious toil that you will be sleeping like a log. But if we can get home to Jesus, it will be all right.

So here is my second thought that our dear office manager Linda Verdugo shared with me as we talked about this passage. I think it is helpful as it shows what does it mean to blaspheme the Holy Spirit. Remember when Jesus was on the cross, there were two thieves also hanging on a cross on either side of Him. All three of them were crucified. One thief continued to mock Jesus, even as the thief was dying!

The other thief, however, realized his sins, repented, and recognized Jesus as his only means of hope restored and a place in heaven. The Gospel of Luke in the Bible describes that scene:

*Luke 23:39 One of the criminals hanging beside Jesus scoffed, "So you're the Messiah, are you? Prove it by saving yourself—and us, too, while you're at it!"*

*Luke 23:40 But the other criminal protested, "Don't you fear God even when you have been sentenced to die?"*

*Luke 23:41 We deserve to die for our crimes, but this man hasn't done anything wrong."*

*Luke 23:42 Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom."*

*Luke 23:43 And Jesus replied, "I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise."*

I think that is a clear representation of our choices that we need to choose wisely and not choose poorly and commit the unpardonable sin of "deliberately resisting the Holy Spirit's witness and invitation to turn to and follow Jesus. It becomes unpardonable when the person dies because death will end all his/her chances to accept Jesus."

In the end it is not about our external sins because look, these are thieves who have robbed or burglarized and hurt people and Jesus forgave them. No, this historical account shows it was that one of the thieves in his dying breaths mocked, rejected, and pushed away the reality of who Jesus was. While the other one who was equally guilty as a thief, recognized his sin, and wanted to repent. He chose to trust Jesus by saying, "Will you remember me when you go to heaven?"

It's a super simple ask, but a deep request from the heart. And Jesus responded at that instant! He knew that the thief in his heart, who was literally on death row, accepted Jesus and He instantly got a visa to heaven.

In the end thanks to Jesus we always have hope restored. God is so amazing that He would die on a cross to remove our sin. He loves us no matter what our sin. He is patient that even if a thief has spent His entire life rejecting Him, He will accept Him at the end.

If God is love, why reject Him? Hell is a place we choose to go to when we choose to get away from God. If God is love, then hell is a place with no love, and that would be hell.

Now one can gamble and think, "I will lead a life of eat drink, and make merry and wait till the very last second to jump over onto Jesus' side, like the thief on the cross.

**U**ntil then, I will follow the world's way of money, sex, and power and popularity."

Don't be foolish. You don't know when it's your time that is up. Trust me. I have done so many funerals. You don't know. We can all die in unexpected ways.

To be clear: Following Jesus and having a life led by the Spirit is NOT just about getting the visa to heaven, though that is good. No, it's about also bringing heaven to earth in your life RIGHT NOW. Jesus says that if you follow me then you can have an abundant life right now. You can have a life that has a great purpose right now. You can have a joy and optimism in the midst of pain. You can have power from the Spirit right now to help you face the challenges. It's not a life without pain but a life with the Spirit that helps you with our pain, our depression, our addiction, our sickness, our stress, and our unforgiving heart. When we are weak His grace will make us strong.

God says, "It's okay. Turn to me and my Spirit and you will find right now love and acceptance."

That is good news! That is hope restored.

Jesus once told this parable:

*Luke 12:16 "A rich man had a fertile farm that produced fine crops.*

*Luke 12:17 He said to himself, 'What should I do? I don't have room for all my crops.'*

*Luke 12:18 Then he said, 'I know! I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I'll have room enough to store all my wheat and other goods.*

*Luke 12:19 And I'll sit back and say to myself, "My friend, you have enough stored away for years to come. Now take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry!"*

*Luke 12:20 "But God said to him, 'You fool! You will die this very night. Then who will get everything you worked for?'*

*Luke 12:21 "Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God.*

A rich relationship with God. That's what we should seek.

Now, I know that none of you are thieves on a cross, but maybe this is day, when you want to say, "Okay, no more fussing around. I think I need to say formally that I do want to live a life that is Spirit led, a life where I see God at work and not misinterpret what He does as demonic, but rather as good and with a purpose. He wants the best for me, so I want to hear His voice and follow Him and learn more about Him."

Some of you have made that commitment, while others have not. Maybe you once did but you have been off the track. But now you want to get back on and to say in essence, "Jesus will you remember me in heaven? And yes, I want to follow You here as best as I can every day of my life right now here on earth."

If that is your heart's desire, please pray with me now.