TITLE: The Second Greatest Sin!

TEXT: Mk. 3:22-31; Mt. 6:9-14; Mt. 18:21-35

INTRODUCTION: This morning I want to talk about the second greatest sin.

 Before we can talk about what I believe is the second greatest sin we should probably deal shortly with the first greatest sin.

 The first greatest sin is the sin for which there is no forgiveness. Do you realize that there is a sin that cannot or will not be forgiven?

Jesus speaks of it in:

**Mark 3:-28-29 (NIV)
28I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. 29But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin.”**

***blas-fay-me'-ah* From G989; *vilification* (especially against God):—blasphemy, evil speaking, railing**.

What had preceded this statement from the Lord was that there where those who had just witnessed the miracles of God being performed in mighty ways, who had been eye witnesses to the works and ministry of Jesus, those who considered themselves to be Godly, god fearing men, yet when face to face with the reality of God before them, out of their own selfish desire to retain their power and high religious position, rejected that witness. And not merely rejected it but they actually attributed it to the work of Satan.

**Mark 3:22 -31 (NIV)
22And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, “He is possessed by Beelzebub! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons.”**

**23So Jesus called them and spoke to them in parables: “How can Satan drive out Satan? 24If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand.**

**25If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. 26And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come.**

**27In fact, no one can 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. 28I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. 29But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin.”**

**30He said this because they were saying, “He has an evil spirit.”**

There are a lot of different views among biblical scholars on just exactly what blaspheme against the Holy Spirit, this sin that scripture says can’t be forgiven, actually is.

 My take on it is that it is the rejection of Jesus as the Christ, when we have been brought face to face with that reality, and not allowing Him Lordship of our life.

 Rejection of Christ is a sin that cannot be forgiven because Christ is our only means of forgiveness.

In rejecting Christ we blaspheme the Holy Spirit because it is the work of the Holy Spirit that reveals Christ to us..

This may be an overly simplified view on this but I believe, at least in part, that is what is being referred to.

But none the less, because it is a sin that cannot be forgiven it is the greatest sin that can be committed.

 But this morning I want to talk about what I see as the second greatest sin.

It is a sin that is especially great when committed within the Church, the Body of Christ. Or once we become a Christian this sin becomes a great sin.

It is the sin of un-forgiveness’.

What makes this the second greatest sin, in my view, is that it is a sin that nullifies the grace of God in our life and withholds that grace from the lives of others.

 In teaching us how to pray Jesus uses this example of prayer…

**Matt. 6:9 -14 (NIV)
9“This, then, is how you should pray:**

**“‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,**

**10 your kingdom come, your will be done**

**on earth as it is in heaven.**

**11 Give us today our daily bread.**

**12 Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.**

**13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.’**

It has always interested me that Jesus only goes on to expand on one particular portion of this prayer and that is Forgiveness.

**Mathew 6:14For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.**

 Our forgiveness is directly linked to our willingness to forgive! **If you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.**

One thing that this tells us is that once we have been forgiven our sins by God any act of un-forgiveness on our part is sin.

 And what makes it so great a sin is that un-forgiveness on our part directly affects our being forgiven by God.

**If you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.**

Expounded on by C.F.D. Moule

"*Once our eyes have been opened to see the enormity of our offense against God, the injuries which others have done to us appear by comparison extremely trifling. If, on the other hand, we have an exaggerated view of the offenses of others, it proves* *that we have minimized our own"*

 Or… once we experience the grace of Gods forgiveness for our own sins, sins and offenses against God that deserve the punishment of hell, of eternal separation from God… once we experience Gods grace of forgiveness in our life for all we have done against Him it should make the offences of man, the offences done against us seem insignificant in comparison.

Jesus illustrates this point to us in a parable….

 Peter was feeling pretty good about his himself one day and came to the Lord, I believe, expecting to be commended for what he was about to say…..

 **Matt. 18:21 -35 (NIV)
21Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?”**

I suppose Peter was feeling pretty spiritual that day when he asked Jesus this question. Expecting Jesus to commend him.

**22Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.**

Then Jesus goes on to illustrate true forgiveness….

**23“Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. 24As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. 25Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.**

**26“The servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’ 27The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.**

 The Master didn’t just give his servant an extension on the loan, more time to pay it off, but actually canceled the debt. He forgave the debt completely.

 This illustrates the completeness of God forgiveness to us.

**28“But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded.**

**29“His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.’**

**30“But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. 31When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened.**

**32“Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. 33Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ 34In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.**

**35“This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.”**

What does this tell us? There are expectations placed upon us who have been forgiven our sins by God... If that forgiveness is really appreciated it will necessitate a like response on our part.

It will necessitate our being willing to forgive Just as we have been forgiven.

Un-forgiveness for the Christian is cancer to our soul.

 It is something that will eat away at our spirit until it destroys anything that God is trying to do within us.

 When Leonardo da Vinci was painting The Last Supper, he became angry with a man and lashed out at him. He even threatened him. Then he went back to his studio and tried to paint the face of Jesus. He couldn't for there was too much evil stirring inside him.

 The lack of peace forced him to put down his brushes, go find the man, and ask his forgiveness. Only then did he have the inner calm needed to do the face of his Master.

An un-forgiving heart will nullify Gods grace upon our life and nullify the grace that He intends us to bestow on others.

As a Christian if we refuse to forgive it is like our spitting on the cross of Christ.

It is like telling God that what Jesus did on the cross, the sacrifice that He made, was not good enough.

Example:

 Years after her concentration camp experiences in Nazi Germany, Corrie ten Boom met face to face one of the most cruel and heartless German guards that she had ever contacted. He had humiliated and degraded her and her sister. He had jeered and visually raped them as they stood in the delousing shower. Now he stood before her with hand outstretched and said, "Will you forgive me?" She writes: "I stood there with coldness clutching at my heart, but I know that the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart.

 I prayed, Jesus, help me! Woodenly, mechanically I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me and I experienced an incredible thing. The current started in my shoulder, raced down into my arms and sprang into our clutched hands. Then this warm reconciliation seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes. 'I forgive you, brother,' I cried with my whole heart. For a long moment we grasped each other's hands, the former guard, the former prisoner. I have never known the love of God so intensely as I did in that moment!"

Corrie then said: To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover the prisoner was you.

To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover the prisoner was you!

Un-forgiveness is bondage. When harbored in ones heart un-forgiveness will neutralize the grace of God in ones life and keep us held captive to our own sin.

 If we are not willing to forgive all the wrong done to us then we cannot really feel the forgiveness of God.

 Un-forgiveness on the part of a professing Christian is what movement is to a broken bone. It is something that will prevent ultimate healing.

Example: When I broke my left arm several years ago it was casted from my fingertips to my armpit to keep me from moving my arm so that the bone would heal. Due to our financial situation I went back to work way too early and when I was at work I didn’t behave myself. I was released to go back to work only if I would wear a sling while I was there.

 I was a working manager, if the line got short of help I was expected to jump in and help out. And I would.

 But it is very awkward to bag groceries with a sling on so I would take the sling off and just bounce the cans off of my cast into the sack. Actually I became pretty proficient at it.

 But after a few months when they x-rayed my arm they found that it had went into a non-union. The bone wasn’t healing---most probably because there was too much movement around the break sight.

 So they had to go back in and take everything apart and start over again but this time doing a bone graft. Taking healthy chips of bone from my hip and placing it around the break site in my arm to help the bone heal.

 I went back to work but still didn’t wear the sling very much. It took almost 5 years,12 surgeries and three bone grafts to get my arm healed.

 I can’t say for sure but my guess is that it was largely because I didn’t do what was necessary to keep the bone from moving to allow the break to heal properly.

 When we are un-forgiving as a Christian it will create a friction in our soul that will prevent God from doing the healing work that He wants to do in our life…In our life and in the lives of others around us.

Any act of un-forgiveness on our part will hinder the forgiveness of God upon our own lives.

**If you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.**

 Why is God so adamant about our being willing to forgive the things others have done to us?

Just contemplate the cross of Christ and what Jesus did there.

Close your eyes for a moment this morning.

 Picture Jesus being whipped with a cat of nine tails.

A leather whip with nine separate woven leather strands and woven into the leather strands are sharp and jagged pieces of broken pottery and bone.

 With each lash upon Jesus back it rips and shreds His flesh. 39 times the lash comes across Jesus back and outstretched arms.

 Then picture Him as he is hit, spit upon and mocked by a jeering crowd as He has a crown of thorns placed upon His head and he is forced to carry His own cross up the hill outside of the city to His place of execution.

Try to picture in your mind his being nailed to that cross as the Roman soldiers drive the nails deep into his hand and feet to hold Him to that cross as the cross is then lifted up and dropped into the hole in which it will stand.

 Picture Him as He has to heave Himself up upon the nail driven in His feet so that he can expand His lungs to take a breath---repetitiously, over and over again for over 3 hours….

 Picture Him, He who knew no sin of His own becoming the sacrifice for your and my sin as he is hanging there on that cross. In total agony…Every nerve ending in His body on edge and on fire from the pain.

 Now what is it that Jesus is saying from that cross as He looks down upon a crowd that is still jeering and mocking Him even as He is hanging there before them?

**Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they do!**

 As you have contemplated this scene in your mind know and understand this…

Jesus has done this for you! He has done this for me! It is you and I that He is asking the father to forgive because it is for your and my sin that He offered Himself as a sacrifice on that cross.

 If God can forgive us for the price that He had to pay for our sin, the price that He had to pay to redeem us, how can we not forgive those who may have wronged us in some way?

 If what Jesus did on the cross for you and me doesn’t make all the wrongs that others may have done to us look trifle, look small and even insignificant in comparison, then we need to call into question the reality of our own salvation experience.

 If we have un-forgiveness in our heart we will never grow beyond that un-forgiveness in our relationship with God until and unless we release that un-forgiveness.

 And the only way to release un-forgiveness and get out from under its burden and oppression is to forgive.

 To forgive just as we have been forgiven.

 Freely, completely and with no strings attached.

 We have been called by God to forgive so that we can truly experience His forgiveness.

 We have been called to forgive others who have wronged us and we have also been called to forgive ourselves.

 Many will forgive the transgressions of others but have a very hard time forgiving themselves….

 And being un-forgiving of self is just as big a sin as any other area of un-forgiveness! It too will neutralize the grace of God in ones life and it too is a slap in the face of Christ saying that what He did on the cross was not good enough.

 Bruce Larson once told the true story of a Catholic priest living in the Philippines, a much-loved man of God who once carried a secret burden of long-past sin buried deep in his heart. He had committed that sin once, many years before, during his time in seminary. No one else knew of this sin. He had repented of it and he had suffered years of remorse for it, but he still had no peace, no inner joy, and no sense of God's forgiveness.

 There was a woman in this priest's parish who deeply loved God, and who claimed to have visions in which she spoke with Christ, and He with her. The priest, however, was skeptical of her claims, so to test her visions he said to her, "You say you actually speak directly with Christ in your visions.

 Let me ask you a favor. The next time you have one of these visions, I want you to ask Him what sin your priest committed while he was in seminary."

 The woman agreed and went home. When she returned to the church a few days later, the priest said, "Well, did Christ visit you in your dreams?"

 She replied, "Yes, He did."

 "And did you ask Him what sin I committed in seminary?"

 "Yes, I asked Him."

 "Well, what did He say?"

 "He said, 'I don't remember.'"

 This is what God wants us to know about the forgiveness He freely offers us. When our sins are forgiven, they are forgotten. The past--with its sins, hurts, brokenness, and self-recrimination--is gone, dead, crucified, and remembered no more. What God forgives, He forgets.

And this is the forgiveness that He has called us to as a Christian.

Church our world today is starving for forgiveness.

 Gods forgiveness and your and my forgiveness.

 The story is told in Spain of a father and his teenage son who had a relationship that had become strained. So the son ran away from home. His father, however, began a journey in search of his rebellious son. Finally, in Madrid, in a last desperate effort to find him, the father put an ad in the newspaper. The ad read: "Dear Paco, meet me in front of the newspaper office at noon. All is forgiven. I love you. Your father."

 The next day at noon in front of the newspaper office over 800 "Pacos" showed up. Each one seeking forgiveness and love from their fathers.

 God has posted a sign at the foot of the cross that in essence reads: "My Dear child, meet me in front of the cross. All will be forgiven. I love you. Your Heavenly Father."

 Corrie ten Boom, in her book Tramp for the Lord had these words to say regarding forgiveness:

 It was 1947--. I had come from Holland to defeated Germany with the message that God forgives. It was the truth they needed most to hear in that bitter, bombed-out land and I gave them my favorite mental picture. Maybe because the sea is never far from a Hollander's mind, I like to think that that's where forgiven sins are thrown. "When we confess our sins," she said, "God casts them into the deepest ocean, gone forever--. Then God places a sign out there that says No Fishing Allowed!"

 That is how God forgives us and that is how He expects us to respond to His forgiveness.

 Whether that forgiveness be to others or to ourselves..

 To forgive as God forgave is to cast the sins and wrongs committed against us, into the deepest ocean and then post a sign that says no fishing allowed!

 This morning are you forgiving as you have been forgiven setting the prisoner free and living the life of freedom that God has for you to live being an administrator of the grace of forgiveness that you have received?

 That is what the cross of Christ is all about.

 When we forgive the prisoner that we set free is ourselves….