

Our theme for this morning is the 'Spiritual peril of denying the truth of God.' What is this truth of God that we deny? The greatest truth about God is revealed to us in and through Jesus Christ who said, 'I am the way, the truth and the Life.' So denying the truth of God is to deny the truth of Jesus that he is God in human flesh who came to save us sinners. This denial of the truth is known as 'apostasy' which is an abandonment or renouncement of a religious belief or principle. Here the religious principle or confession is 'Jesus is Lord'. If one denies the truth about Jesus then we are likely to face judgment.

This was exactly the problem with the Pharisees. What happened to the Pharisees? They had witnessed the healing of the man with evil spirits; they had witnessed the man with a shrivelled hand being healed and so many other signs. In spite of all this they were not in a position to accept who Jesus was. They go to the extent of saying that he has Beelzebul and by the ruler of demons he casts out demons. Jesus retorts by asking as to how Satan would be fighting against Satan if he was indeed Beelzebul as they claimed. Jesus gives them the example of a kingdom and house both of which if they are divided would naturally collapse. In a similar manner Satan's own rule would come to an end if there was infighting within their ranks. On the contrary, Jesus talks about Satan as a strong man who has to be bound before taking control of him. Jesus goes on then to say that all kinds of blasphemies will be forgiven but the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.

The Scribes from Jerusalem had probably witnessed some of the exorcisms that Jesus and his disciples did and were not in a position to accept that this was by the finger of God and the power of God. Jesus consistently prevents the demons from revealing his identity as the Son of God. What the people saw was that there was an instant healing whenever Jesus gave the commands for the evil spirits to leave. Exorcism not only reveals the power of Jesus and the power of those who derive their authority from him. It also reveals what is happening at the level of the supernatural power struggle which underlies the earthly ministry of Jesus. Jesus' control over the demons speaks of the collapse of the kingdom of Satan in the face of the incoming kingdom of God. The power of Satan which is a real force which had a free reign thus far has now beginning to see its end. It has now entered into the phase of terminal decline. Jesus uses the picture of a strong man who has been bound by an even stronger one and he is goods are now vulnerable. That is what Jesus does to Satan and all his forces. The Ministry of Jesus shows the decisive turning point in history in the contest between good and evil for the control of the world and its people. Jesus gives enough evidence for the people to believe that it is by the finger of God and by the power of the Holy Spirit that he was doing these exorcisms. However, the scribes from Jerusalem attribute it to Beelzebul the prince of demons. The word used for 'saying' is in the imperfect which shows that it was not a passing comment but a sustained campaign of vilification. The Jewish scribes accused him of being possessed and Mark underlines this as they repeat the accusation in vs 30. Two accusations against Jesus are that he is possessed by Beelzebul (Lord of the filth) for Beelzebub (Lord of the flies) the Prince of demons and that all his works of exorcism. They were calling that which was good as evil and that which was evil as good. They deliberately called the work of God's Holy Spirit as the work of the evil Spirit. Jesus is the one through whom the Spirit of God is now dramatically at work. The ultimate significance of the exorcisms is to show who Jesus is, the Christ, the Son of God.

What does it mean to blaspheme against the Holy Spirit? In Jesus' case, when he cures the man who is possessed with evil spirits, the scribes of Jerusalem attribute it to the power of Beelzebul the chief of demons. In other words, what Jesus does through the power of the Holy Spirit is attributed to the work of demons. Jesus cautions us against that kind of interpretation. What is happening here is that even though the Scribes were given enough evidence to believe that all the miracles that Jesus did was through the power of the Holy Spirit, they deliberately choose to ignore the evidence and claim that it is the work of the evil spirits. When we deliberately choose to reject the truth that is presented before us, and infact go to the opposite extreme and claim that this is from the devil, then we will be guilty of blasphemy. If we persist in continuous rejection of the truth, and exchange the truth for a lie then we are guilty of blasphemy

As Christians we need to be careful that we do not deliberately reject the truth and exchange the truth for a lie when God works in our midst and reveals his glory. We can become like the Pharisees and Scribes and be blinded to the truth of Jesus Christ by our own self-righteousness. May God help us to stand firm in the truth; the truth of Jesus Christ, who is the way, the truth and the life.