

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Mark 03: 28-35

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the Bible again. We'll continue to read Mark chapter 3, verses 28 to 35.

In Mark's account, Jesus is depicted as serving tirelessly like a servant, even neglecting rest and meals. His relatives, unable to bear seeing this, thought Jesus had lost His senses and came out to restrain Him. Though their actions stemmed from blood ties and natural affection, their well-meaning intervention inadvertently provided an opening for those who sought to malign Jesus. A group of scribes from Jerusalem seized this opportunity to claim that Jesus was possessed by Beelzebub and casting out demons by the ruler of demons— one questioning Jesus' identity and the other His work.

Jesus quickly refuted their doubts with a few statements showing their arguments were illogical. Jesus was conceived by Mary through the Holy Spirit. Though appearing human on the outside, He was truly the Son of God inside, with authority and casting out demons by the Holy Spirit. In the parallel passage in Matthew 12:28, Jesus added, "But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you." Here, Jesus plainly indicated that casting out demons by the Spirit of God meant the kingdom of God had arrived among them. Essentially, the kingdom of God is where the Holy Spirit can move freely and exercise authority.

Similarly, today's church operates in the same way. When the Holy Spirit can freely move and exercise authority within the church, then the church has the reality of the kingdom of God. Conversely, if a church is filled with regulations, human consciousness, and conformity to worldly trends such that the Holy Spirit cannot freely operate, then the church merely retains the appearance of the kingdom of God but lacks its substance or practical manifestation. I believe that if believers honestly confront their inner feelings, they will admit that many churches have fallen into this state lacking the actual presence of the kingdom of God. Let us

sincerely seek the Lord's mercy, grant us humble hearts, and be willing to repent, allowing the Holy Spirit to reign within the church.

As for those scribes who came from Jerusalem seeking trouble for Jesus, even then Jesus was full of compassion and mercy, still hoping that they would repent and be saved. In this spirit, Jesus spoke a few more crucial words, deeply meaningful but possibly not easily understood through superficial reading, perhaps even conflicting with our natural human concepts. Let us hope that we all can be humble, setting aside our presumptuous natural ideas, and allowing the Holy Spirit to help us understand these words.

Verse 28-30: “Assuredly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they may utter; but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation”— because they said, “He has an unclean spirit.”

At the beginning, Jesus said, "Assuredly, I say to you," which is a phrase commonly used by Jesus in the New Testament. The word "assuredly" in Greek is "amen," which is the same word we often say at the end of prayers, meaning "truly" or "I fully agree." Here, when Jesus says "amen" to you, He is emphasizing the truth and importance of the words He is about to speak. When Jesus makes such a solemn declaration, these words must be very significant. What are these words? "All the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them, but the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven them. Whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation."

In these sentences, Jesus reveals three facts: firstly, all the sins committed by men can be forgiven— "men" here referring to every person in the world, including you and me. All our sins can be forgiven. Secondly, all blasphemies spoken by men can also be forgiven. And thirdly, only blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven and will bear eternal consequences.

Now let's delve into the first point: all the sins committed by men can be forgiven. Living in a relativistic world, we tend to relativize everything, including sins, categorizing them into major and minor sins. Most believers often avoid major sins but continuously commit minor ones. When we commit minor sins, we are confident in receiving forgiveness; however, if we occasionally commit major sins, we may feel it's more challenging to obtain forgiveness. Furthermore, we tend to impose harsh judgments on others, especially those who commit serious crimes like murder, arson, or rape, often believing they are beyond forgiveness. Yet, Jesus clearly tells us here that every kind of sin can be forgiven.

Whether the sins are committed by ourselves or others, of various kinds, Jesus Christ bore them all on the cross, and therefore God forgives them all. Of course, when we sin, we offend God and those we harm, and from God's perspective, He forgives us. However, from the human perspective, these debts still need to be reconciled, and the cost of reconciliation can be significant. For example, if someone takes a life, they may have to give up their own life as restitution. Yet, this does not affect God's forgiveness toward them or His gift of eternal life. Even after our earthly life passes, in the new heaven and new earth, the eternal life received through faith remains. Therefore, it's crucial to understand that all sins committed by people can be forgiven.

The second point is that all blasphemies spoken by men can also be forgiven. The word "blasphemy" comes from the Greek word "blasphemia," which means to switch right for wrong, turning what is wrong into right, or as commonly said in Chinese, distorting the truth or deliberately lying—essentially, going against or defying. Before we knew God or believed in Jesus Christ, how many people preached the gospel to us only to be rejected, sometimes even joked about God and Jesus? At that time, we were blaspheming against God and Jesus Christ because we were going against them. Yet Jesus says that all these blasphemous words can be forgiven. If you have doubts, Matthew 12:32 directly points out, "Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him." This means that those scribes who came from Jerusalem to harm Jesus, if they are willing to repent, they too can obtain forgiveness.

The third fact is that only blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is an unforgivable sin, which is very serious. Sometimes, we may worry if we accidentally commit this unforgivable sin, which would be catastrophic. To put your mind at ease, let me tell you frankly: you won't. Once you believe in Jesus Christ, you won't accidentally commit this unforgivable sin, so you can be reassured about this point.

Now let's understand what blasphemy against the Holy Spirit means. Firstly, why is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit never forgiven? First, let's look at what blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is. In this instance, Jesus was casting out demons by the Holy Spirit, but these scribes claimed He was doing so by Beelzebub, the ruler of demons. This was illogical, as Jesus had pointed out. In fact, these scribes knew in their hearts the truth but deliberately twisted it to persecute Jesus—essentially, they witnessed the work of the Holy Spirit but falsely attributed it to demonic forces. They were going against the Holy Spirit, which is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

Why is someone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never forgiven? When a person opposes and resists the Holy Spirit, they hinder the Holy Spirit from working in them. It's not that the Holy Spirit is unwilling, but rather, the individual blocks the path for the Holy Spirit to work in their life.

In reality, everyone's grace and salvation are the work of the Holy Spirit. If you reflect on the moment when you decided to believe, initially you might have thought it was your decision to believe. However, before you made that decision, the Holy Spirit was already at work within you. The Holy Spirit had already softened your heart—perhaps through the environment around you, the people you knew, or the circumstances you were facing. All these factors were operating under God's sovereignty, creating a space in your heart for the Holy Spirit to enter. The Holy Spirit helped open your heart, enabling you to see the truth of the gospel, feel the beauty of the gospel, and ultimately decide to believe.

Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit involves resisting the Holy Spirit's work within oneself, thereby preventing one from accepting the Holy Spirit's help to believe. Consequently, such a person cannot receive salvation because the sacrifice of Jesus

Christ does not apply to them, and their sins remain unforgiven, leading to eternal condemnation. This is why blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is an unforgivable sin.

Furthermore, it's essential to understand that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit specifically pertains to rejecting the identity and work of Jesus. If you refuse to acknowledge the salvation offered by Jesus, then you commit the unforgivable sin. Some charismatic groups in churches may incorrectly claim that rejecting their prayers or blessings amounts to blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, but this is not accurate. Every true believer who accepts the salvation of Jesus Christ already has the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and cannot commit blasphemy against Him. While they may not always discern the Holy Spirit's leading or fully obey His guidance due to spiritual immaturity, this does not equate to blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit occurs when one refuses to accept the Holy Spirit's guidance to believe in Jesus Christ. Once you accept and believe in Jesus, you cannot commit blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Even if you are not yet a mature Christian, once you believe in Jesus Christ, you are already a saved Christian.

After addressing the malicious opposition from the scribes, verses 31 to 35 then return to Jesus' well-meaning relatives who had initially tried to restrain Him. It was their intervention that inadvertently provided an opening for the malicious opposers, and now they have come to see Jesus along with His mother and brothers.

Verse 31: “Then His brothers and His mother came, and standing outside they sent to Him, calling Him.”

Mary, the mother of Jesus, certainly knew Jesus and understood that He was the Son of God. However, this intellectual understanding did not diminish her natural affection and care for Jesus. When Mary heard that Jesus was so busy that He couldn't rest or eat, she hurried over to see Him. On the other hand, Jesus' brothers did not believe in Him at this time. It was only after Jesus' death, resurrection, and

ascension that they one by one came to believe in Him. During Jesus' ministry on earth, to some extent, they opposed Him.

Mary and Jesus' brothers arrived outside Peter's house and sent someone to call Jesus out from His busy work so that He could rest. Their intentions were indeed good-hearted.

Verse 32-33: “And a multitude was sitting around Him; and they said to Him, “Look, Your mother and Your brothers are outside seeking You.” But He answered them, saying, “Who is My mother, or My brothers?”

Jesus' response, at first hearing, may seem somewhat illogical, considering that Mary was His mother, an elder, and acting out of familial affection and goodwill. Jesus answered in this manner for the sake of His twelve disciples because it presented a teachable moment. Jesus wanted them to understand that in the household of God, relationships among believers are not based on blood ties, familial affection, or natural emotions. So, what are they based on?

Verse 34-35: “And He looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him, and said, “Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother.”

Jesus here demonstrated a profound example by first looking around at those seated around Him. Perhaps He individually observed each of the twelve disciples and even glanced at many others who were willing to follow Him but were not named. Jesus then said while looking around, "Look, my mother and my brothers!" and concluded by stating, "For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother."

Jesus' proclamation truly broadened our perspective and vision. Here, Jesus was not diminishing the importance of blood ties and familial relationships but highlighting that such relationships are temporal, fleeting, and unreliable. The day

we close our eyes on this earth, our earthly relationships will cease because they are bound by time. Therefore, we must establish an eternal and more reliable relationship beyond earthly ties. This relationship is spiritual, connected to eternal life, and aligned with God's eternal will. This eternal relationship surpasses all transient and unreliable earthly relationships.

Dear brothers and sisters, therefore, we must cherish the brothers and sisters around us because our relationship with them will last forever. Moreover, in eternity, Jesus Himself will personally call us brothers and sisters. How blessed we are! Here, I want to specifically mention Mary because of the Catholic tradition that elevates Mary to the position of a saintly mother, giving her a special aura that suggests Mary was always so holy, mature, and glorious. In reality, according to the Gospel accounts, Mary also went through a process of growth.

The virgin Mary was indeed pure and brave. She was willing to simply believe and fulfill God's will upon her. After Mary gave birth to Jesus, she took Him to the temple in Jerusalem for the first time, where they encountered the prophet Simeon. Simeon not only praised God because of Jesus but also prophesied over Mary. In Luke 2:34-35, it says, "This child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. This prophecy was directed at Mary herself, indicating that her heart would also be pierced with sorrow.

I believe that at the time, Mary did not fully understand Simeon's prophecy. Later, during the Passover when Jesus was twelve years old, Mary took Jesus to Jerusalem for the festival. However, Jesus stayed behind in the temple, discussing with the teachers there, and did not return with them. Mary, thinking Jesus was lost, hurriedly searched for Him and returned to the temple. When she saw Jesus in the temple, she sorrowfully asked, "Son, why have You done this to us?" Jesus replied, "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business. Jesus was referring to His heavenly Father, and Mary did not fully understand His words at that time.

Later, when Jesus turned thirty and began His ministry, His first recorded miracle was turning water into wine at a wedding in Cana, as described in John 2. Mary, who was likely familiar with the master of the wedding, approached Jesus when the wine ran out, asking Him to help solve the problem. In John 2:4, Jesus replied to her, "Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come." Mary knew Jesus had the ability, and influenced by her motherly concern, she urged Jesus, who then reluctantly performed His first miracle.

As we move to the events described in Mark 3, Mary likely continued to grapple with her personal attachment to Jesus, a sentiment that may have persisted until Jesus was crucified.

In John 19:26-27, while Jesus was already nailed to the cross, Mary stood by His side along with the disciple John. Seeing Jesus nailed to the cross, Mary's heart was truly pierced like a sword, and it was then that she truly understood Simeon's prophecy, realizing how painful it was to let go of earthly relationships. At that moment, Jesus looked at Mary and said, "Woman, behold your son!" Then He said to John, "Behold your mother!" At that moment, Mary's heart was pierced, and she let go of earthly bonds. Jesus replaced the physical relationship with a spiritual one, and replaced earthly ties with God's will.

From that day forward, John took Mary into his own home and cared for her. John served Mary until her passing, after which he began his ministry. Through the pain of Mary's heartache, she matured and became seasoned. Rather than saying that John was fulfilling his duty of honoring Jesus by caring for Mary, it's more accurate to say that John received blessings from Mary. During the time he lived with a mature and seasoned Mary, John underwent a complete transformation—from a tempestuous person to an apostle filled with life and love. After Jesus' resurrection, His brothers also became His disciples one by one. James wrote the Book of James, and Jude wrote the Book of Jude. Eventually, Jesus' relatives replaced physical relationships with spiritual ones, and replaced earthly ties with God's will.

In this passage from verses 20 to 35, we see four groups of people. The first group is the twelve disciples who followed Jesus to learn from Him. They came to

understand Jesus' identity and His work, and they learned to prioritize God's will over familial relationships, adding a spiritual dimension to their physical connections. The second group consists of the crowds who witnessed Jesus casting out demons, healing the sick, and heard His preaching. Among them were those who believed and those who did not. The third group comprises the scribes or Pharisees who opposed Jesus with ill intentions, yet Jesus cautioned them against blaspheming the Holy Spirit, committing the unforgivable sin. The fourth group includes Jesus' own relatives, who were to embrace an eternal relationship beyond mere kinship. Dear brothers and sisters, today you also encounter these four groups of people around you. Which group do you belong to? Can you follow Jesus' example and appropriately engage or encourage these four groups of people?

Let us pray together: Lord, we thank You for presenting this passage before us, allowing us to reflect and learn. We specifically pray for the seekers and the loved ones of believers in our church. We believe that each seeker who comes to our church is guided by You. May they not only hear Your words during church gatherings but also witness the loving relationships among the brothers and sisters, prompting their hearts to desire to join this spiritual family. We ask for special help for the loved ones of believers, granting them wisdom to transcend biological and relational ties, establishing an eternal, spiritual connection that surpasses time and geography, making them brothers and sisters in Christ for eternity. We also pray for blessings upon our church, that we may be united and grow in the name of Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ's name we pray, Amen!