

The Pink Elephant in the Room

Mark 3:20-30

Prepared by Mac Plunkett

I'm going to tell you all not to think about pink elephants. So everyone, don't think about pink elephants! Now, what was the first thought that popped into your head when I told you not to think about pink elephants? I bet it was a pink elephant. Don't lie to me! Now that's just a humorous experiment. The prohibition produced the prohibited thought. Now imagine there was a law with criminal charges prohibiting thoughts about pink elephants and the government implanted chips in your head so that they could detect if anyone was thinking of pink elephants. You can bet that if there were signs posted saying "don't think about pink elephants" there would be several arrests made at those signs. Now imagine there was a scripture verse that said "you are automatically going to Hell no matter what if you think about pink elephants." I can imagine a lot of faithful, Bible believing Christians would be incredibly stressed upon reading that passage. In fact, I can imagine a lot of Christians giving up their walk with God and just going about doing what they want and trying to enjoy this life as much as possible when they came across this passage. After all, they're already going to Hell, so what's the point? A verse like that might be the devil's favourite verse.

When I was confirmed at my parents' church, I was given a Bible. The minister encouraged me to use it and read it and not have it sitting on the shelf collecting dust but to be a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path. I took that injunction seriously and set about on a plan to read at least portions of every book of the Bible in a year. The first Gospel I read in full was Mark. When I came to our text today I was terrified. Anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven. What does that mean? What does blasphemy against the Holy Spirit look like so I can avoid doing it? Does it look like a thought that I just had? Oh no! I just thought a potential blasphemy against the Holy Spirit! And because thought is as bad as action (see Jesus' exposition on murder and adultery in the Sermon on the Mount), does that mean I'm going to Hell?

Today, I'm going to respond to those fears that I had and the fears that some of you may have had upon reading this text. And I'm going to first assure you that this is a sin that is actually very difficult to commit by accident. It's not a "pink

elephants” sin. Let’s look at the story to gather some clues. So Jesus was making huge waves in Israel as he went about doing His ministry. He was ushering in the Kingdom of God by healing diseases, making the blind see and the deaf hear and the lame leap for joy! He was cancelling funerals by raising the dead. He was preaching the Good News of the Kingdom of God, that upside-down Kingdom where the last were first and the first were last. He was even driving out demons. The religious scholars of the day saw all of this and knew that Jesus’ obvious displays of power could only mean one of two things. One was that Jesus was in fact the long-awaited Messiah who was coming to redeem Israel and inaugurate the Kingdom of God. The other possibility is that it was Satan trying to trick the people into following a false messiah. Since Jesus wasn’t strictly following their rules they figured it must be the latter.

But what of Jesus’ casting out of demons? Well, they reasoned that it must be by the authority of the prince of demons that Jesus is driving out demons. When Jesus heard this accusation, He rounded on them. He basically said that their charge made absolutely no sense. Satan wouldn’t be running around casting out his own demons. That would be profoundly stupid of him. So the only other explanation would be that Jesus is doing this by the authority of God and that means that the Kingdom of God is breaking in and the religious scholars are refusing to see it! That is why Jesus accuses them of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit! They have convinced themselves of their own righteousness so much, that they can’t even recognize when they might be wrong and need forgiveness.

You see it is the Holy Spirit that convicts us of sin. It is His prompting that causes us to recognize our guilt and our need for a Saviour. Without the Holy Spirit’s tugging on our hearts, we would not even be aware that we need forgiveness. When a telemarketer calls with an offer, you can just politely decline. Some time down the road that company may call you again with the same or a different offer. If you ask them to take you off their calling list, then you won’t receive any further calls from that company with any offers. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is like asking God to put you on His do not call list. When that happens, you won’t receive any conviction and be completely unaware of your need for forgiveness. Let me put a point on this to make it abundantly clear: If you are worried that you may have accidentally committed this sin, then you have not! This sin prevents you from even feeling bad about it.

There is no sin that is beyond God's power or mercy or love to forgive. You can't out-sin God's grace! God will forgive any sin that you ask Him to forgive. He will forgive all sins when you cast them at the foot of the cross. The reason blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is unforgivable is not because God wants nothing to do with those that commit it, as if there were a class of people that God can just stop loving, but because those that committed it won't even turn to God for forgiveness. There are two types of thinking that close you off from salvation. One is the type of thinking that the Pharisees had.: Being so sure in their own righteousness that they couldn't even see their need for forgiveness. The other is the opposite: Feeling that your own sins are so bad that they can't be forgiven. That is the biggest lie that the devil tells us. Both of these types of thinking come from the same root: Pride! One is pride in righteousness the other is pride in sin. The only way that these sins can be forgiven is by dropping our pride and opening ourselves up to the healing power of God's grace. Then we can become participants in the Kingdom of God! Amen.