

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

<sup>21</sup> *When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind."*

<sup>22</sup> *And 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."*

<sup>23</sup> *So Jesus called them and spoke to them in parables: "How can Satan drive out Satan?" <sup>24</sup> *If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. <sup>25</sup> *If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand.***

<sup>26</sup> *And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come. <sup>27</sup> *In 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. <sup>28</sup> *I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. <sup>29</sup> *But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin."****

<sup>30</sup> *He said this because they were saying, "He has an evil spirit."*

<sup>31</sup> *Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. <sup>32</sup> *A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you."**

<sup>33</sup> *"Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked.*

<sup>34</sup> *Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers!" <sup>35</sup> *Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother." (Mark 3:20-35)**

### **What does Opposition to Christ Look Like?**

What does it look like when someone is working against you? Take a high school student for example. Imagine that there's someone in his school that just doesn't like him. No matter what he says or does, that bully tries to ruin it for him. Obviously, that bully is working against him. But is there a more subtle kind of opposition? What about a person who claims to care about that student – maybe a teacher or even a relative. But that adult just doesn't believe in that student. So every time the student tries to reach for something, that adult reins them in. Maybe in the adult's mind, they're really doing what's best for that student. But in the end, they prevent that student from reaching his goals. They may convince him not to try something that would've been hard. But he'll never know if he could have done it or not. There are different ways to work against someone. In our gospel lesson for this morning, we see examples of two approaches the devil uses to work against Christ. He didn't just use these approaches when Jesus was walking this earth. He still uses them today. So we need to understand what he's doing. **What does opposition to Christ look like?**

#### **I.**

The first kind of opposition that we see is the opposition of the teachers of the law. This group of men had made a career out of interpreting the Old Testament laws. From the very beginning of Jesus' ministry, they had opposed him because he taught a gospel of forgiveness. That undermined the law that they held so dear because they imagined that they could reach heaven by their obedience. They thought that they were righteous in God's eyes and other people needed to live up to their standard. So they came all the way from Jerusalem to stop Jesus' teaching. They focused on what they thought was Jesus' real drawing card: his miracles. They said, **"He is possessed by Beelzebub! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons."** They couldn't deny that Jesus had driven demons out of people who were possessed. There was too much evidence for that. So they claimed it was a trick of the devil himself. That made Jesus nothing more than a tool of the devil.

It was a pretty clever attack, don't you think? But the Lord wasn't about to let the devil get away with this kind of slander. He pointed out the foolishness of Satan driving out Satan. A demon possessed person is under the devil's control. Satan can do whatever he wants with them and to them. If Satan drives out his own demons, he's waging war against himself. That could only weaken his kingdom. In fact, Jesus goes on to say that if you want to rob a strong man's house, you have to tie him up first. Otherwise, he's going to fight against you. What was his point? Simply this: that he himself had come into this world to tie up the devil. He was robbing the devil's house every time he preached the gospel and created faith in the hearts of people that once belonged to the devil. There was simply no way the devil was going to fight against himself when he had a fight against Jesus on his hands.

But then Jesus said, **“I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin.”**

What does “blasphemy” mean? The first thing most of us think of is saying insulting things about God. I once helped out a campus ministry by inviting students to come to church. I knocked on one door and invited a young man to come. A few minutes later, he drove past me and shouted that there is no God. That was blasphemy. But in the New Testament, blasphemy means more. It means working and speaking against God. It’s any denial of his glory or his work. It was blasphemy for those teachers of the law to call the Son of God a tool of Satan. In our day, blasphemy abounds. Movies and art portray Jesus as sleeping around or in horribly offensive positions and acts. Those things are blasphemy. And every voice that ridicules the gospel or denies God’s work in Christ is also blasphemy.

Jesus says that all sins and blasphemies will be forgiven except that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. He doesn’t mean insulting the Spirit. That is a sin, but he means actively working against the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the person of the Trinity who creates faith in our hearts. All unbelievers resist his work – they fight it, until he changes them and makes them believers. Here, Jesus is talking about something greater. We sometimes call it hardening. It’s the kind of thing that Pharaoh did in the Old Testament. After each plague, he knew God had worked and he begged Moses to take away the plague. But when relief came, he hardened his heart and refused to believe. The teachers of the law were guilty of the same sin. They saw the miracles. They could not deny that Jesus had freed people possessed by demons, or that he had healed the sick and raised the dead. They had heard him declare that he was the promised Savior and they could not help but see the truth of it. But they hardened their hearts against God and his word. That was unforgiveable because once you shut the gospel out of your heart, there’s no way to come to faith. God only gives faith through the gospel. God only gives forgiveness through faith. So the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit – hardening your heart against the gospel – leaves you with no way to come to faith and forgiveness.

Now, many Christians have asked themselves, “Am I guilty of the sin against the Holy Spirit?” If you’re asking the question, you’re still listening to God. You wouldn’t ask it if you had done it. You would simply be hardened in your unbelief. But that doesn’t mean that there’s nothing here for us to learn for our own time. The sin against the Holy Spirit accompanies opposition to Christ. How many voices are there in our society that openly oppose Jesus and his word? I read a lot of news online and again and again, I encounter attacks on Christianity. Whether it’s people like that college student yelling rude comments about God or Hollywood portraying all conservative Christians as loveless fanatics, this world is full of people who attack Christ.

Now, we can’t know who among them has committed the sin against the Holy Spirit. Only God can look into the heart. But their opposition places them in danger. And it makes our lives harder. In this supposedly Christian country, there are many people who hate our message. The devil works every day to stop the preaching of the gospel. **What does opposition to Christ look like? Open attacks by unbelievers.**

## II.

I don’t think any of us are too surprised by that. But open persecution isn’t the only battle we have to fight. There’s another kind of opposition that you see in the actions and attitudes of Jesus’ own family. **What does opposition to Christ look like? Subtle smears by people who claim to believe.** Mark tells us that a huge crowd formed and Jesus and his disciples couldn’t even eat. His family heard about it and they came to “take charge of him” because they concluded that he was out of his mind. Why did they reach that conclusion? They may have thought that he had become so obsessed by his work that he clearly couldn’t be rational. That’s why he didn’t even take time to eat. But I also wonder if it didn’t have something to do with what they perceived to be a circus atmosphere around him. Everywhere Jesus went, crowds came, hoping to see a miracle. The way the reports filtered back to his mother and brothers, maybe it sounded like Jesus was in the middle of a wild and crazy situation. Something must be wrong with him.

Whatever their thinking was, two things are clear: first of all, they did not understand or believe his message. The Bible actually says that about Jesus’ brothers. It may not have been as true about his mother, but she did take part on this occasion. Secondly, they thought that putting an end to this nonsense would be good for Jesus. Opposition to Christ doesn’t always come in the form of mockery or frontal assaults. Sometimes, the most effective attacks that the devil launches come under the cover of love and concern. Jesus exposes that at the end of our text when his mother and brothers arrive and try to get him to come out and go with them. Jesus

knew why they were there before they even spoke. So he asked, **“Who are my mother and my brothers?”** And then he pointed to the people sitting around him, listening to his message, and he said, **“Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.”**

Jesus’ miracles were only signs designed to get people to listen to the message he proclaimed. The real purpose of his ministry was to preach and teach the good news that he had come to die for our sins. Faith in that promise is all that we need to reach heaven. And the will of God, first and foremost, is that we hear that message. Everyone who trusts in Christ is a part of his family. And everyone who is a part of Christ’s family, needs to live that faith. That begins with doing what these people were doing: hearing his word.

Are we part of that family? We are here today, and that’s a good sign. But there are lots of people who are guilty of subtle opposition to Christ while claiming to love him. They just don’t take his words seriously. They justify sin in the name of love. My wife told me about an interview she heard on the radio where some famous musician was saying that she supported homosexual marriage because her Christianity embraced it. But God’s word calls homosexuality a sin. Anytime we don’t take God’s word seriously, we’re acting in unbelief. And that’s the scary thing here. It’s so easy for you and me to think that we’re faithful Lutherans. But when God actually says things like separate from false teachers and that means that we can’t participate in church services that have a different message, we shrug that off. It seems so harsh. Or when God tells us to faithfully hear the word, we figure that in the summer, we need to spend time with our families, so we make it to church a whole lot less. We justify a sinful attitude with love for our families. And the list could go on and on. In the end, all those attitudes are examples of making the hard things that God says seem evil or heartless.

If we’re honest, don’t we all have to admit that there is some of that attitude in our own hearts? We’re sinners. Inside each one of us there is a sinful nature that hates all that God says. While our faith fights against it, in so many subtle ways, that sinner affects our thinking and our decision making and our feelings about how we live as Christians. For those subtle, sinful attitudes, we all deserve God’s judgment in hell.

But that sinful weakness inside us is not the same as the sin against the Holy Spirit. We are believers and God has created a new man inside us who wants to do what is right. That new man fights against the attitudes of our sinful nature. And God promises us victory through Christ. Jesus died and paid for all the times that the sinner inside us wins. He died and paid for the sinful nature we were born with and for all the times we followed that nature and then justified it with pious sounding words like love. And Jesus rose and that means all those sins are forgiven. Jesus promises that he will preserve our faith. The devil is working with our own sinful nature to destroy our faith. He wants us to harden our hearts against God. And in our sinful weakness, it sometimes seems like we are so close to falling. But in our sin and weakness, our Savior comes to us and forgives us. He promises that he will keep our faith alive, no matter how hard it is to be a believer here. He won’t let the sinner inside us destroy our faith. He won’t let the opposition of the devil and the world defeat our faith. He will win.

How do we know that is true? Because he won in his own life. The teachers of the law didn’t silence him. They thought they did when they finally crucified him. But Jesus won when he died. He paid for our sins and he rose and his message is still bringing sinners to eternal life two thousand years later. He will win in our lives, too. It is true that we can turn our back on him and harden our hearts against him. But it is also true that he works through the gospel to keep that from happening. He calls us to come here, week after week, to hear the gospel and build up the faith that keeps us from turning away. Trust in him and face the opposition of the devil, whatever it looks like in your life, because your Savior is greater and he will win in your life. Amen.