

In his Good Friday message (2010), Sydney Anglican Archbishop, Peter Jensen, said that atheism is “a form of idolatry.”

*"As we can see by the sheer passion and virulence of the atheist – they seem to **hate** the Christian God.....
Atheism is every bit of a religious commitment as Christianity itself..... It represents the latest version of the human assault on God, born out of resentment that we do **not** in fact rule the world and that God calls on us to submit our lives to him.... It is a form of idolatry in which we worship ourselves....."*

And I agree... I shake my head, at the way atheists (particularly famous atheists), are so passionately against God, and so passionately against Christians – it’s just remarkable...

It’s like, they **say** they don’t believe that God exists – But they are so filled with hatred,,,,, towards nothing???? ... Where’s the logic of that???

Just about any week, you can find a letter to the Editor in a Newspaper, written by someone who hates God, or hates Christians... And they’ll have ‘rant’ about them, simply because they’ve come in contact with a Christian.

*There’s a chap in Toowoomba, who seems to have made it his life’s mission, to get chaplains and RE, out of public schools. What drives such a person??? Why would someone **so hate** “a God they say they don’t believe exists”?*

There's something spiritual going on here. And it's not something that's new. It was something that Jesus had to deal with.

Today, we're looking at the Spiritual battle, that lies behind a palpable **hatred** of Jesus.

So, in the Gospel of Mark, up until this point, the local Pharisees and Scribes, have been sparring with Jesus. But now they've called in 'the heavies' from 'head office'... The Scribes come down from Jerusalem, and they make an extremely serious accusation against Jesus....

A key sign of the Spiritual authority of Jesus, was exorcisms – Jesus drove out many demons.... But the religious 'heavies' from Jerusalem, make the accusation that Jesus Himself was possessed, and that was where He got His power from... And they said that Jesus was possessed (not just by any demon, but) by the **prince** of demons (Beelzebul)... BTW, that's another name for Satan... And so they were saying, that the only reason Jesus could cast out demons, was because He, Himself, was possessed by the most **powerful** of demons...

Now, that's a very **serious** accusation.

And so Jesus tells 2 parables:

1. The first parable, exposes the "lack of logic" to their accusation; and
2. The second parable, reveals the good news of what's really unfolding

He said:

"How can Satan cast out Satan? ²⁴ If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand.

²⁵ And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. ²⁶ And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end.

Something we know, is sometimes Satan **does** pretend to be something good. In Paul's 2nd letter to the Corinthians, he says that **Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.** , and so there should be no surprises that false teachers (who are Satan's agents), **also** pretend to be Godly men and women...

So, how does **Satan** pretend to be something good??? Well, he pretends to be a 'good' spirit, but his true intent, is to murder, kill and destroy...

We know, there is only One **True** God – The Holy Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit)... And we know that any other (so called) god, isn't a god at all, but is a demon, pretending to be a godⁱⁱ...

And yet these other gods, are often portrayed as being good...
e.g.:

- There is a very real, concerted push today, across the western media, to portray other gods as good and even merciful... *The number of times (in recent years) when a TV show will have an episode, featuring an Islamic terrorist plot or attack, and nearly every time these days,*

one of the goodies, will himself, be a Muslim, and they'll say, "Oh, that terrorism – that's not true Islam – Allah is kind and merciful"

Alright, we're hearing this over and over again: Real Islam is good; Real Islam is good... They're trying their darndest to say, "Hey, this other god, is good" ...

- And then there's the push (in the name of "health"), to take up eastern religious disciplines – Thai Chi; Yoga; and all sorts of meditation...

These are now being highly promoted for their (so called) "health benefits", and even Christians are taking them up, because they've been told:

- "they're good for ya";
- it'll give you better health;
- it'll relieve your stress...

What they haven't been told, (or maybe what they choose to ignore), is "These are religious disciplines, used in the worship of other gods."...

You see, Satan does try to pass himself off as something that's good and beneficial...

And that's what Jesus was accused of here – "You're an agent of Beelzebul"... But there's a very important difference between **these** examples, and the accusation that the Scribes were making against Jesus:

Satan has the intent of spiritually enslaving those who dabble in the worship of other gods by getting involved in these sorts

of things... Alright, be under no illusion – if any of us choose to dabble in the Occult, by participating in:

- séances;
- horoscopes;
- playing with Ouija boards; or
- fortune-tellers;

Or if we become participants in the worship of other gods by:

- doing Yoga; or
- Reiki; or
- Thai Chi;

Or if we head down the “Universalist path”, and begin to accept other gods/religions as being valid,,,,,

Don't be under any illusion – these are all things that Satan uses, to Spiritually bind us.

And participating in these sorts of things, and even using mind-altering drugs, give Satan and his demons, a foothold in someone's life...

And Satan, is **not** in the business of **breaking** the demonic bonds he's already established...

We are in a spiritual battle, And there are 2 spiritual kingdoms at war – the Kingdom of Satan, and the Kingdom of God...

You know, when Jesus was tempted, ^{Matthew 4:8} ... the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. ⁹ And he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.”

And Jesus rebuked him, but get this: “He didn’t rebuke him for lying” – He rebuked him because worship should be reserved for God alone... He didn’t say “These kingdoms aren’t yours” – He couldn’t say that, because – essentially they are...

Something we need to understand, is that, in large part, Satan’s kingdom, in this world today, is extensive...

- Lives bound up in sin;
- A general rejection of God;
- Self-focus and self-worship;
- Mind-altering drug use;
- Religious and spiritual experimentation;
- Demonic oppression; and
- Demonic possession...

Satan’s kingdom, in this world today, is extensive. His kingdom is strong – and its **purpose?** – to claim worship, that rightfully belongs to God...

And so Jesus exposes the flawed logic of the accusations the religious heavies were making against Him:

²⁴ If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end.

Jesus isn’t possessed by Satan. Yes, the Kingdom of Satan is taking a battering, but not from himself... Satan’s kingdom was strong,, and extensive...

But,,, breaking into this world, is the Kingdom of God....

And **this**, is the activity of God that we're seeing take place in the ministry of Jesus Christ....

Jesus' second parable, reveals what's really going on:
no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house.

The Kingdom of God, is breaking into this world... the Kingdom of God, is taking ground **away** from the Kingdom of Satan. And so, when Jesus was casting out demons, Jesus was binding the strong man, so that the strong man's house could be plundered...

This is the spiritual battle, that was ultimately fought and won by Jesus Christ, as He was crucified and rose again, conquering sin and death... But it's also a battle that continues today. It's a battle that will continue, until the **final** victory, when **every** knee will bow, and **every** tongue confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord...

But, how can that be? How can it be said, that Jesus has won the victory, but the battle continues to rage on, today?

Well, Satan's beaten, but our Heavenly Father, is not only giving us time – He is giving us every chance, to turn our hearts towards Him, as our Lord... We cannot blame our

rejection of God, on Satan, because God has limited the **power** of Satan ... If **I** reject God, the blame of “my rejection of God” lays squarely at my own feet – it’s not Satan’s fault...

The strong man was bound – the strong man **is** bound – his power is limited... *{BTW, a very good exposé of this Spiritual Battle, we encountered in Rev 12 (mid 2017), and it might be worth revisiting that message again. Just go to [<<Sermons>>](http://www.bushdisciples.church); <<scroll down to Rev 12.>>}*

Anyway, the strong man is bound – his power is limited, and our Heavenly Father is giving us every opportunity to believe in Him – and not only to believe in Him, but to bow before Him, and to submit to Him as Lord... He’s giving us every opportunity, for us to give our lives to Him, because He is Lord...

The final verse of today’s reading says “³⁵ **For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.**”

To be in the family of God, requires submission through loyal obedience to The Lord...

OK, so a date has been set.... Nobody knows that date, except our Heavenly Father. And when that date arrives, there will be no more time – There won’t be any more opportunities... But until just before the end, Satan is bound – his power is limited...

I love this image here – **no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man.**

Jesus has bound the strongman... And now we, the disciples of Jesus, can confidently (in the name of Jesus) enter the **strong man's house and plunder his goods**

What He's talking about here, is taking the Gospel into the world... Most of this world, is currently in the domain of the Kingdom of Satan, but that shouldn't put us off, because in the Name of Jesus, we can go **into** that domain, and **raid** it for the Kingdom of God...

Rev 12:11 reveals how Christians conquer Satan:

- by the blood of the Lamb; and
- by the word of their testimony, even unto death...

Satan has no power over us. We've been set free from sin and death, by the blood of Jesus... And so we conquer Satan, by continuing on in faith; and by the word of our testimony.... God continues to build His Kingdom – He raids the kingdom of Satan, as we take the Good News of Jesus into the world... That's how we conquer Satan...

So, if we conquer Satan by the blood of the Lamb, and the word of our testimony, how powerful really is, the blood of the Lamb???

- what sins can it overcome?

Jesus said:

8 "Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever **blasphemies they utter, ²⁹ but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin"**

Oh dear....

There is a sin that can't be forgiven – “blaspheme against the Holy Spirit” ...

That used to worry me, because as a kid, I'd heard my dad say “Holy Ghost” as a swear word... And if blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is something that can never be forgiven, does that mean that “My Dad was excluded from any possibility of grace???” Because, particularly in His later years, my Dad really loved Jesus...

Is there really a sin, that once done, can never be forgiven? Is the blood of Jesus ineffective against one particular sin???

Alright, let's look at this in its context:

- Jesus is doing God's work;
- He is breaking in to the Kingdom of Satan;
- Through Jesus, the Kingdom of God, is plundering Satan's Kingdom...

But the religious heavies from Jerusalem, reject Jesus, and they accuse Jesus of being Satanic... And V30 tells us why

Jesus said it: It's because they were saying "He has an unclean Spirit"...

And it occurs to me, that what Jesus says here, is a statement of logic. If faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, is the only way, for any of us to be saved, if I refuse to see and accept the activity of God in Jesus Christ, I cannot be saved... And so, of course, the unforgivable sin – the sin that cannot be forgiven, is the rejection of Jesus...

Anyone who rejects Jesus, rejects the Holy Spirit. Anyone who rejects Jesus, rejects God. And if Jesus is the only means by which God forgives sins, anyone who rejects Jesus, cannot be forgiven...

That's what I believe the unforgivable sin is... To see the activity of God in Jesus Christ – To see The Holy Spirit at work – and to refuse to see the evidence, and to reject it as being evil...

So, let's come back to where we began:
What's going on when people hate God; hate Jesus; and hate Christians???

Spiritually, they've aligned themselves with Satan...

- And while they continue to reject Jesus; and
- in all their pride, deny their need of a Saviour; and
- deny the Lordship of Jesus; and
- deny the activity of God in Jesus, ,,,,,,

while ever this continues, they cannot possibly be forgiven...

But I want you to hear the Good News today:
For now, Satan is bound. And in the Name of Jesus, we can conquer him, by the blood of the Lamb, and the word of our testimony...

Yep, some people might hate God, and that's on them... Our task, is to stand firm in the faith, knowing that by the Blood of Jesus, Satan can't hurt us – the worst he can do is kill the body, but that just means “We get to be with Jesus sooner”...

And so, we stand firm in the faith, and remember that our testimony is powerful... We plunder Satan's kingdom, with the words of what Jesus has done for us...

You know, this is not some kind of airy-fairy fantasy... Your experience of God, has the power to plunder Satan's Kingdom... Let me put that another way: You, telling another person of what you've experienced in Jesus, might be exactly what they need to hear, for them to change their citizenship, to the Kingdom of God...

Questions.

ⁱ <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/nation/church-leaders-unite-against-the-idolatry-of-atheism/news-story/355ef2b4ce5755547e47066975a71073>

ⁱⁱ 1 Corinthians 10:19-22 (ESV)

¹⁹ What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? ²⁰ No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons.

²¹ You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot

partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.²² Shall we
provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?