

“The Big Lie”

Matthew 12:22-38

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • August 11, 2013

Adolph Hitler wrote, “the broad masses of a nation...more readily fall victims to the big lie than the small lie.” That concept has become known as “the big lie.” It’s the idea that by repeating a lie loudly enough and often enough and convincingly, people will eventually believe it as the truth. And, as Hitler claimed, the bigger the lie, the more willing people are to believe it, despite lots of evidence to the contrary.

For example, Nero used the “big lie” when he blamed the Christians for the fires that destroyed Rome. For almost a decade Bernie Maddoff lied to investors as he built the biggest Ponzi scheme in history, eventually cheating the investors out of more than 50 million dollars. One of the biggest lies in history was Hitler blaming Germany’s economic trouble on the Jews. The irony is that when Hitler wrote those words he was claiming that the Jewish people were the ones who were perpetrating the “big lie.”

This morning’s passage begins with another of Jesus’ miraculous healings. We’re told that a man was brought to Jesus who was trapped by evil forces. The result was that he could neither see nor speak, but Jesus healed him and he was able to see and speak. But when we read this we immediately notice that it’s a very short description. There’s not any details about the man or what how Jesus healed him. Matthew simply gives us the problem and that Jesus healed him. What’s most important for us to see is not the miracle but the responses to it.

There are two responses to this healing. First, we’re told, “all the people were amazed, and said, ‘Can this be the Son of David?’” The people have seen Jesus perform miracles, using supernatural powers, and they begin to wonder if he could be the promised Messiah. The Pharisees, on the other hand, respond with their “big lie.” They don’t try to tell the

people that the miracle never happened. Instead, they claim that Jesus is only able to cast out demons by the power of Satan, the prince of demons.

This is not the first time they’ve made that accusation. We find the same charge in Matthew 9:34, for example. The more often they tell the lie, the more the people will believe it. The Pharisees are interested in keeping the people from belief. They were afraid of Jesus and his teaching. On one hand, they recognized him as a rabbi because Jesus acted like a rabbi. He taught from the Law and had a number of disciples who learned from him. But at the same time Jesus violated many of the standards of the Pharisees. He associated with women, which was forbidden. He ate with tax collectors and known sinners, which they viewed as defiling him. As we saw last week, he didn’t keep the Sabbath the way they thought it should be kept. And worst of all, he repeatedly claimed to be God.

Jesus, however, dismantles their claim. He points out that if a kingdom or city or church or household is divided, it will soon be destroyed by internal arguing and dissention. If Jesus is causing harm to Satan’s kingdom by freeing people from the grip of evil, then Satan’s kingdom cannot last. In other words, it’s simply not possible for Jesus to do the things he does by the power of Satan. It must be the power of God at work.

He then tells the short parable that in order to break into a strong man’s house and rob him you must first tie up the strong man. Jesus says that Satan is like that strong man. He indeed is powerful. So in order to set people free from the power of evil and sin, the one setting them free must be stronger than Satan. Jesus is the one who is more powerful. He is able to bind up Satan so that you may be free from the power of sin.

We now come to one of those very important passages in the Bible but one that's also very often misunderstood. Jesus says, "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters." It's impossible for anyone who has heard about Jesus and the things he does to be neutral. Each one of us has to decide whether we believe that Jesus is who he says he is – that he is God – or we reject the Bible's claims. What we decide will determine our actions every moment of every day.

The great preacher James Montgomery Boice puts it like this: "If the kingdom has come in Jesus and the demands of the kingdom are that people submit to Jesus' rule as king, then neutrality is impossible. You may think that you do not care about Jesus one way or another, but if you are not for him, you are actually opposing him." Jesus calls each of us to deny ourselves, take up our crosses, and follow him. If we don't we're not "for" Jesus.

It's even more serious than that. To refuse to believe is dangerous. It can lead to what is commonly called the "unforgivable sin." Jesus warns us that there is a sin that will not be forgiven. Unfortunately, this passage has been misunderstood and misused in the church too often. People have sadly taken their own lives, thinking they had committed the unforgivable sin. But if you look closely, you will find that there is great hope in those verses.

Jesus says, "every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven." Even speaking against Jesus can be forgiven. So what is it that can't be forgiven? If Jesus is fully God and the Holy Spirit is fully God, how can speaking against one be forgiven but not the other? Well, it comes down to repentance. If you hear the good news of the Gospel presented and you repent and believe in Jesus as your Lord and Savior, you are forgiven. No matter what you've done in the past. There is

nothing you can do that will not be forgiven in Christ.

But if you hear about Jesus, if you read about the miracles he performed by the power of God, and you reject him, you are in danger. Faith in Jesus only comes by the working of the Holy Spirit. The Pharisees were in danger not only because they rejected Jesus, but because they called evil good and good evil. When they saw the work of the Holy Spirit in healing people from the grip of Satan, they called it evil. We find the same thing in our society today. There are many people, some of them in positions of authority, who call the work of Christ evil and at the same time lift up sinful thoughts and behaviors as good. And yet even those people can receive forgiveness and new life in Christ.

The unforgivable sin, therefore, is to reject the work of the Holy Spirit showing you Christ, until you die. At that point it's too late and it becomes unforgivable. But as long as you are still in this world there's time for you to discover the truth of Christ and believe in your heart.

The last section of our passage deals with what's in our heart. How can you tell if you really believe in Jesus? By the things you say when you let your guard down. Jesus says, "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil." Anyone can say the right things if we take the time to think about them and are careful with our words. Politicians do it all the time. But what about our "off-the-cuff" comments? Are your words kind and loving or harsh and critical? What do you say about that person who pulls out in front of you and you have to slam on your brakes?

Jesus said, "on the day of judgment people will give account for *every careless word* they speak. Every careless word. You and I will

have to stand before God and answer for every unkind thing we have said.

It seems to me that this is a good place for each of us to focus our attention. If you find that you sometimes have a sarcastic or biting remark, ask yourself where that came from. Could that be what's in your heart? Perhaps it's time to ask God to work on that area of your life. Ask him to take away the bitter

words and replace them with kind ones. Ask him to change your heart so that there are no more bitter words. Ask him to help you forgive others the way he has forgiven you so that out of the abundance of your heart will come loving words that build up other people. And believe the big truth instead of a big lie.

Amen