

Sermon Notes Choose Well

Mark 3:20-34

20 Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. 21 When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind."

22 And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, "He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons."

23 So Jesus called them over to him and began to speak to them in parables: "How can Satan drive out Satan?"

24 If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25 If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. 26 And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come. 27 In fact, no one can enter a strong man's house without first tying him up. Then he can plunder the strong man's house. 28 Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter, 29 but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin."

30 He said this because they were saying, "He has an impure spirit."

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

33 "Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked.

34 Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers!"

35 Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."

Introduction

Jesus did not fit in very well.

He was at odds with his family's sociological script and with the religious authorities.

Even among his closest companions, as we have just read in 3:19, there is one who will betray him.

But undergirding all of that resistance from the beginning, he was at odds with Satan.

This passage has a chiasmic structure (ABCBA) and is an example of Mark's way of framing one episode with another (a Markan sandwich):

- A; Verse 20 - Crowd
- B; Verse 21 - Family
- C; Verse 22 - Scribes (Jesus is casting out demons by the ruler of the demons)
- D; Verses 23-27 - The parables of Satan's end
- C'; Verses 28-30 - Scribes (They are Guilty of unforgivable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit because they have said that Jesus has an unclean spirit)
- B'; Verse 31f - Family
- A'; Verse 32f - Crowd

Here Jesus' conflict with his family frames an account of his conflict with the religious establishment, and at the center of the chiasm is the conflict with Satan, told in a parable.

This conflict began in the wilderness from which Jesus emerged proclaiming the kingdom of God in Mark 1:12-15.

Now it is Satan's kingdom or household that is in question.

The first group introduced in the passage is the crowd, pressing in on Jesus and his disciples.

The word *crowd* appears in 14 of the Gospel's 16 chapters, and even in chapter 1, where the word itself does not appear, the whole city gathers around the door (Mark 1:32-33),

everyone is searching for him (Mark 1:37), and he can no longer go into a town openly (Mark 1:45).

At the other end of the Gospel, a crowd will arrest him in Mark 14:43, and the crowd will call for Barabbas' release and Jesus' death in John 15.

The crowd presses upon him, threatening to crush him, in Mark 3:9, so much so that Jesus has a boat ready for his escape, and by Mark 4:1 he is preaching from the boat

because of the size of the crowd.

Jesus and his disciples cannot manage to eat in the present passage, and the same happens in Mark 6:31.

But in Mark 6:34, Jesus will have compassion on the crowd, whom he sees as sheep without a shepherd, and he will teach and feed them.

So here also, when the crowd of Mark 3:20 reappears in Mark 3:32, it has become his inner circle, people whom he identifies as his brothers and sisters and mother when his family of origin has rejected him.

In Mark 3:21, Jesus' family goes out to restrain him.

The verb used here is also used to describe Jesus' and John the Baptist's arrest (Mark 6:17).

They are saying that he has gone out of his mind.

While the crowd is drawn in, the family becomes outsiders.

This contrast between insiders and outsiders is further developed in 4:11, again in connection with Jesus' teaching in parables.

Those inside are given the secret of the kingdom, but those outside are left unmoved and mystified.

The family's rejection of Jesus here is echoed in John 7:5, where we read that his brothers do not believe in him.

We also find references in John 7:20 and 8:48, 52 to accusations that Jesus has a demon.

Then in John 10:20 the suggestion that he is possessed accompanies the accusation that he is out of his mind.

Here in Mark 3:21-22, the two accusations come together again as the scribes from Jerusalem conclude that the power behind Jesus' exorcisms must be Satan himself.

The scribes have already been mentioned at the very opening of Jesus' ministry as those whose teaching is less authoritative than Jesus'.

They question in their hearts and accuse him of blasphemy when he forgives the paralytic in Mark 2:6.

They criticize him in association with the Pharisees in Mark 2:16 and again in Mark 7:1, 5.

But when the Pharisees fade away as the story moves toward Jerusalem, the scribes continue to hold a central role in the opposition, alongside the chief priests and elders.

The reference to Jerusalem in 3:22 hints at the ultimate conflict with the Jerusalem religious authorities.

Jesus, preaching in Jerusalem, will warn the crowd in Mark 12:38-40 to beware of the scribes who like to be honored in public places while they secretly devour widows' houses.

"They will receive the greater condemnation" (Mark 12:40).

Already here Mark 3:29-30 they are guilty of an unforgivable sin because they mistake the Holy Spirit for Satan.

They recognize that Jesus must be drawing on great power to perform exorcisms but fatally misidentify its source because he does not behave as they expect

a righteous person to behave, which is to say, most of all, that he is not one of them.

He associates with the wrong people, breaks Sabbath laws, and blasphemes by forgiving sins, and so they commit the greatest blasphemy of all.

Exorcisms, of which there are four in Mark in addition to many other references to them, point to the cosmic battle with Satan, a battle that begins immediately after Jesus' baptism

when the Spirit drives him into temptation.

The unclean spirits recognize Jesus from the beginning and know that Jesus can destroy them (Mark 1:24) as others are plotting to destroy Jesus (Mark 3:6)

Now Jesus makes clear, in the form of a parable, the scope of what he is doing in his freeing of the demon-possessed.

Jesus is coming to plunder Satan's household and bring about his end, not by division from within but by stealth and force from without.

Jesus, who was stronger than John the Baptist (Mark 1:7), is stronger than the strong man Satan too.

Jesus' stealthy binding of the powers of evil ultimately undermines Satan so completely that even when he appears to have succeeded in destroying Jesus in the crucifixion,

the very destruction of the Son issues not in defeat but in the mysterious victory of God.

This passage, like most passages in the gospels, contains the whole story in a nutshell.

At the center is Jesus' victory for the kingdom of God, the subversion of the strong man by the stronger one and the freeing of the plunder, God's good creation.

Moving out from there, we also see reflections in Jesus' story of the story of the community in which the Gospel was first told and read and proclaimed and the ones who in following Jesus have met similar resistance.

These, like Jesus and his disciples, may have lost mothers and fathers and sisters and brothers and houses and fields for the sake of the good news (Mark 10:28-30)

and may have felt themselves under threat from powers and principalities as he was.

So for those people, then and through the ages, there is comfort in the turn from restraint and threat to freedom, courage, and hope, even in the face of the ones who would kill Jesus.

Then here perhaps are we, the crowd pressing in to see him and touch him, maybe urgently and desperately, but as the tale turns we find that our desperate desire has been more than met.

We also are claimed by him as his sisters and brothers and mother, no longer outsiders at a distance, but holders of the secrets of the kingdom, drawn into the inner circle of the mystery and love of God.

Text

1. This is an interesting passage, because it talks about the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, something that Jesus calls the unforgivable sin.

A. If you have ever wondered what exactly is the unforgivable sin, we will talk about that in today's message.

B. It is also an interesting passage because this is the first of what is called Mark's "sandwich stories," that is, a story within a story.

1) A number of times in his gospel, instead of telling two stories separately, Mark will start with one, move on to the second, and then come back and finish the first one.

2) There are two reasons Mark does this.

1. The first is simply a matter of style.

- By introducing the story but leaving it unresolved,
- Mark builds interest and tension until he returns to the story later to finish it off.

2. But the second reason is theological.

- Mark sees the two stories as somehow connected, and he wants us to look for the theological parallels between them.

3) Other examples of sandwich stories in Mark include:

- Jesus raising Jairus' daughter from the dead and healing the woman subject to bleeding.
- Jesus cursing the fig tree and clearing the temple.
- and the plot to kill Jesus and his anointing at Bethany.

2. There are times in life when you need to choose sides.

A. Some of us don't like that.

1) We would rather try to straddle the fence or ride down the middle of the road,

2) But there are certain times when you have to take a stand and choose your side.

- For example, if you are in the military and in the middle of a battle, you better know which side you are on.

B. Well, there is no more important instance of choosing sides than when it comes to the person of Jesus Christ.

1) Jesus said, "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters." ([Matthew 12:30](#))

- 2) And so you need to decide.
- 3) Will you side with Jesus Christ or against him?

C. Mark gets this point across with this sandwich story of Jesus' family coming to get him and the teachers of the law accusing Jesus of siding with Satan.

- 1) And though one offense is certainly more serious than the other, they are both instances of opposing Christ rather than coming over to his side.
- 2) And so they are both examples of choosing the wrong side.

3. Jesus' family comes to take him away (verses 20-21)

A. We begin with this part about Jesus' family coming to take him away.

Look at verses 20-21:

Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind." ([Mark 3:20-21](#))

B. Once again, Mark stresses Jesus' popularity here.

- 1) Jesus is teaching and healing and casting out demons, and now there is such a big crowd that Jesus and his disciples are not even able to eat.
- 2) Somehow Jesus' family up in Nazareth hears about this, and they determine to come and get him.
- 3) It is twenty miles from Nazareth to Capernaum, so this was a full day's walk for his family.

C. They say he is out of his mind.

- 1) I want you to notice two things about his family in these verses.
 - First of all, they say that Jesus is "out of his mind."
 - The word literally means "to be beside yourself,"
 - And it was used for people who were mad or insane.
 - You might be surprised that Jesus' family didn't believe in him here,
 - And we find in other passages in the gospels that indicate the family did not believe.
 - For example, [John 7:5](#) comes right out and says: "Even his own brothers did not believe in him."
 - This is a good reminder to us that when you follow Jesus, some people are going to think you are crazy.
 - When the apostle Paul appeared before Governor Festus and talked about Jesus' resurrection, Festus called him mad.

"You are out of your mind, Paul!" he shouted. "Your great learning is driving you insane." ([Acts 26:24](#))

- Martin Luther was called a fool and demon-possessed by those who opposed him.
- And people may call you crazy, too.
- As with Jesus, it may even be members of your own family.
- That's when you need to remember that you have already chosen your side; you have chosen to follow Christ no matter what happens.
 - Secondly, they come to take charge of him.
 - So Jesus' own family says that he is out of his mind.
 - And then they come to take charge of him.
 - The word translated "take charge" here is the same word used of arresting someone elsewhere in Mark.
 - In Florida this is called "Baker-Acting" a person.
 - If you can show that a person is mentally unstable, you can take charge of that person and even have them locked away for observation.
 - Jesus' family thinks that he has gone off the deep end, and they come to take him away.
 - They are probably well-intentioned and only want what's best for him, but their actions also demonstrate a lack of faith in Jesus and his mission.

D. Mark introduces this story of Jesus and his family here in verses 20-21 but then he leaves us hanging.

1) He suddenly switches gears to the story of Jesus' confrontation with the teachers of the law and will return to the story of Jesus and his family later in verses 31-35.

4. Jesus confronts the teachers of the law (verses 22-30)

A. So let's switch over to the story where Jesus confronts the teachers of the law.

B. The teachers of the law accuse Jesus (Verse 22)

And the story begins with the teachers of the law accusing Jesus.

Look at verse 22:

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." ([Mark 3:22](#))

C. Apparently word about Jesus had gotten to Jerusalem, and so the teachers of the law make the trek out to Capernaum to investigate Christ.

1) It was seventy miles from Jerusalem to Capernaum, so they had even farther to go than Jesus' family had to travel.

2) And when they get there and find Jesus preaching and teaching and casting out demons and the people all gathered around him, and so they accuse him of two things.

- First of all, they accuse him of being possessed by Beelzebub.
- Now Jesus' family thought he was out of his mind, but this accusation was far worse.
- The word "Beelzebub" means "Lord of the Flies."
- It was another name for Satan in those days, and so they were NOT just saying that Jesus was possessed by a demon, but by Satan himself!
- That's a pretty bad accusation.

- And then secondly, they accuse Jesus of driving out demons by the prince of demons.
- Jesus clearly had acquired a reputation for casting out demons.
- We have seen several specific examples of that already.
- The gospel of Matthew tells us that this particular confrontation with the teachers from Jerusalem came right after Jesus healed a demon-possessed man who was both blind and mute.

([Matthew 12:22](#))

- So what are the teachers of the law doing here?
- They are seeking to discredit Jesus.
- They obviously cannot deny his ability to cast out demons.
- Everyone can see that.
- But they can cast doubt on the source of his power.
- The bottom line is they don't believe Jesus is from God, and yet he clearly has supernatural powers.
- And so they accuse him of driving out demons by the prince of demons, Beelzebub, or Satan himself.

5. Jesus responds to His critics in parables (23-27)

A. Jesus responds to their accusations with a series of parables.

B. You can see that in verse 23:

So Jesus called them and spoke to them in parables. ([Mark 3:23](#))

C. Notice that Jesus first called them to Himself.

- 1) Apparently they were making these accusations behind his back, and not face to face, and so Jesus had to call them forward to address them.
- 2) And when he did, he spoke to them in parables.
 - A parable in the Bible is any type of saying or story that contains a comparison or a parallel.
 - This is the first mention of parables in Mark's gospel, but we have already seen Jesus using parables in his teaching, for example when he said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick" ([Mark 2:17](#)) and when he gave the illustrations of the unshrunk cloth and the old and new wineskins. ([Mark 2:21-22](#)).
 - Jesus' most famous parables are the ones that he told as stories, but these shorter comparisons or analogies are also examples of parables.

D. A house divided against itself cannot stand.

- 1) So let's look at the parables Jesus used here.
- 2) Jesus responds to their second accusation first, that he drives out demons by the prince of demons.
- 3) Look at verses 23-26. Jesus asks:
[How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come. \(Mark 3:23-26\)](#)
- 4) If Jesus is casting out demons by the power of Satan, then Satan is fighting against himself.
 - But that doesn't make any sense.
 - It's like a military unit firing on each other instead of on the enemy.
 - Or let's say you are in the Super Bowl.
 - You are running for the winning touchdown, you've got a clear field ahead of you, when suddenly your own teammates chase you down and tackle you.
 - Or how about a band of bank robbers entering a bank, and the chief bad guy robs his partners instead of the teller?
 - Well, none of that makes any sense.
 - And that's what Jesus is telling the teachers of the law.
 - He is saying, "What you are saying doesn't make sense.
 - How can Satan drive out Satan?
 - A team has to work together.
 - If Satan opposes himself and is divided, then he cannot stand and his end has come."

E. And so, you must tie up the strong man before you can rob him.

- 1) That's Jesus' answer to the second accusation.
- 2) Jesus now goes back to answer the first accusation, that he is possessed by Beelzebub.
Look at verse 27:
[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. \(Mark 3:2\)](#)
- 3) Imagine a strong man armed to his teeth.
 - I mean this guy is built.
 - He's huge. He works out.
 - Not only that, he's got an automatic rifle in his hands, and he's not afraid to use it.
 - If you're going to rob this guy, you can't just walk in and start taking things out of his house while he stands by and watches.
 - No, you're going to have to overpower him and tie him up first.
 - Then you can rob his house, and he can't do anything about it.
 - But if you're going to do that, you better make sure you are stronger than him to begin with.
- 4) In this parable Satan is the strong man.
 - Make no mistake. Satan is a powerful, malevolent being.
 - You cannot just walk up to him and start plundering his kingdom.

- That's what Jesus is saying here.
- Jesus could not be robbing Satan's house by casting out demons unless he had overpowered and tied up Satan first.
- In other words, Jesus is not controlled or possessed by Satan.
- Satan is controlled and overpowered by Jesus!
- Satan is strong, but Jesus is stronger.

6. And then Jesus warns about blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (28-30)

A. After telling them these parables, Jesus warns these teachers of the law about the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. Look at verses 28-30:

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." He said this because they were saying, "He has an evil spirit." ([Mark 3:28-30](#))

B. Jesus says that "All types of sins and blasphemies can be forgiven."

- 1) There's some good news and bad news here.
 - 2) The good news is that all kinds of sins and blasphemies can be forgiven.
 - 3) That is really good news.
 - 4) It means that no matter how badly you have sinned against God, God can still forgive you.
 - 5) Even the sin of blasphemy can be forgiven.
- Blasphemy means deliberately mocking or profaning God, so that's pretty bad sin.
 - All types of sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them.
 - The Bible says that even blasphemy against Jesus can be forgiven!

C. But Whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven.

- 1) And this is the bad news, Jesus said, "Whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin." ([Mark 3:29](#))
- 2) Here we come to the unforgivable sin which is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.
- 3) If all other blasphemies can be forgiven, this must be exceptionally bad to be singled out as an eternal sin that is beyond forgiveness.
- 4) So, what exactly is the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit?
 - It is only mentioned here and in the parallel accounts of the gospels, so we need to get the context from this particular event.
 - Mark tells us that Jesus said this because they were saying, "He has an evil spirit." ([Mark 3:30](#))
 - And so it would appear that the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is attributing the work of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' life to Satan.
- 5) It's the blasphemous belief that Jesus was not empowered by God through the Holy Spirit, but that he was in fact a servant of darkness and got his power from Satan.
- 6) Such a hardening of the heart towards God's work in Christ through the Holy Spirit that you would call it the work of Satan is a blasphemy that will not be forgiven.
- 7) The person who does so is guilty of an eternal sin.

Illustration:

A couple years ago a certain atheist web site presented what they called "The Blasphemy Challenge," where they challenged people to upload YouTube videos of themselves denying the Holy Spirit.

A whole lot of atheists responded to the challenge and uploaded their videos, saying "I deny the Holy Spirit." It was very sad to see and meant to be shocking, but ironically enough, I am not sure they were actually blaspheming the Holy Spirit as Jesus defined it.

They were certainly committing serious sin, but they were not attributing the work of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' life to Satan.

In fact, I'm not sure if an atheist is even capable of blaspheming the Holy Spirit. If blasphemy of the Holy Spirit means believing that Jesus was doing supernatural works by the power of Satan rather than God, how can you do that when you don't believe in the Holy Spirit, Satan or God? What these atheists did is sad, it is wrong, and if they never come to Christ for forgiveness, they will be judged for their sin, but I do not believe they have actually put themselves beyond God's forgiveness. By definition it would seem that an atheist cannot commit blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

- 8) Sometimes people worry that they may have committed the unforgivable sin.
- 9) But I would say if you are worried about it, then you haven't done it.
- 10) If you had truly blasphemed the Holy Spirit, your heart would be so completely hardened against God that you wouldn't be worrying about whether God could forgive you.

D. What I would be more concerned about are forgivable sins.

- 1) You know what's worse than committing the unforgivable sin?
- 2) Committing forgivable sins but never turning to Jesus Christ for forgiveness. That's really sad.
- 3) The teachers of the law saw Jesus the Son of God doing good works by the power of the Holy Spirit, and they said he did it by Satan's power.
- 4) In so doing, they chose their side for all of eternity.
- 5) Jesus said, "Whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin." ([Mark 3:29](#))

7. And now Jesus identifies his true family (verses 31-35)

A. Finally, Mark returns to the story of Jesus and his family.

B. Jesus' mother and brothers call for him.

Look at verses 31-32:

Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you." ([Mark 3:31-32](#))

C. So Jesus' family finally arrives.

- 1) Remember, they are concerned that Jesus is out of his mind, and they have come to take charge of him.
- 2) Jesus' adoptive father, Joseph, is not mentioned, and we assume he has died by this time.
- 3) They send a message in to Jesus, and those in the house tell him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you."

D. And Jesus reveals that those who do God's will are Jesus' true family.

- 1) Well, you would probably expect Jesus to go out and see them, but instead Jesus answers: "Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother." ([Mark 3:33-35](#))
- 2) First Jesus asks cryptically, "Who are my mother and brothers?"
- 3) Then he answers by pointing at those sitting at his feet listening to his teaching.
- 4) The gospel of Matthew tells us that Jesus specifically singled out his disciples here; "These are my mother and brothers!"
- 5) But then he extends his words to all those who do God's will. "Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."

E. When you come to Christ, you become a part of his family.

- 1) John 1:12 says, "To all who received him [Jesus], to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."
- 2) Jesus is not dismissing or disrespecting his physical mother and brothers here.
- 3) What he is saying is that there is a family bond among Christians that is even stronger than physical ties.
- 4) Those who do God's will are Jesus' true family, and this spiritual family was even more important than his physical family.

F. Jesus is not as harsh with his family as he was with the teachers of the law.

- 1) His family was not blaspheming the Holy Spirit.
- 2) But they are showing a lack of faith, and they are seeking to interfere with his mission.
- 3) As much as Jesus loved his family, his mission must come first.
- 4) In the same way, we are to love our families, and we are to honor our parents, but God comes first.
- 5) Our earthly families are temporary and only have to do with this life.
- 6) But when you come to Christ, you enter a spiritual family that is forever.
- 7) Jesus' family stood outside calling him away from his mission, and Jesus had to choose sides.
- 8) He chose God's side, and stayed true to his mission.

CONCLUSION:

Where do you stand with God today?

Where do you stand with Jesus Christ?

Jesus said, "You are either with me or against me." ([Matthew 12:30](#))

And so you need to decide.

Not deciding is deciding.

You either choose to stand with Christ, or you have decided against him.

Let me give you a clue here.

Jesus' side wins.

Jesus showed his strength over Satan by binding the strong man and casting out demons.

Satan's side loses.

Satan cannot stand against Christ.

I trust that none of you have committed the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit.

If you did, you probably wouldn't be here today.

And so there is still time for you to choose sides.

Whose side are you on?

I pray that you will choose to stand with Christ, now and forever.