

The Need to Fully Embrace Jesus

The Gospel of Mark: Mighty and Mild / Mark 3:20-35

Introduction:

How have you responded to Jesus Christ? That is the crucial question the gospel calls for us to answer over and over. Mark's gospel account shows this question is more than just have we believed in His death and resurrection. That belief is vitally important, but Mark helps us to see that true belief always includes something more. It includes things like full allegiance, sacrifice, a reorientation of priorities, living for the glory of another, and treasuring Jesus Christ above all else. So, let's the question again. How have we responded to Jesus Christ? Our passage today moves us to think deeply on that question as it highlights contrasting responses to Jesus and concludes with only one available option. Before we move through it, we should understand a literary technique Mark employs in his gospel called sandwiching, where he inserts one story in the middle of another to make one point from the two. Commentator James Edwards describes the purpose of this well, saying, "In so doing, Mark not only signifies a relationship between the two stories, but by their combination succeeds in making an entirely new point" (James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 117). Our passage is the first time Mark uses this technique. Pay attention to what he records in verses 20-21 and 31. Mark opens with Jesus' family going out to seize him in verses 20-21, and then has them arriving and calling him in verse 31. In between these scenes, he interjects a serious confrontation with the scribes. This signifies a relationship between these stories, revealing they are communicating one overarching truth when we consider together. We can break this down into 3 scenes building to that truth. The first scene, in verses 20-21 shows how

IT IS EASY TO MISUNDERSTAND THE WORK OF GOD THROUGH JESUS

In the flow of Mark's gospel, Jesus recently withdrew from the crowds to choose 12 apostles for three purposes, seen in verses 14-15, "that they might be with him... he might send them out to preach," and they might "have authority over demons." This begins a distinction Mark highlights between the crowds and true disciples. A distinction further heightened in our passage. Notice again the way Mark begins in verses 20 "Then he went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat." Pause there. Notice they are back at a home, likely Simon and Andrew's home from Mark 1:29. The crowd has gathered again, and they could not even eat. This is getting to a dangerous level of intrusion on Jesus' life. Look at verse 21, "And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, 'He is out of his mind.'" Some translations say, "his friends" or "his own people." The vague language here causes these differences, but family appears to be the best translation because Mark identifies Jesus' mother and brothers later in verse 31. In any translation the point is not lost because the focus is on the reason for them coming to seize Jesus, "for they were saying, 'He is out of His mind.'" The Greek here shows they are continually saying this. It could be translated, "they kept on saying, 'He is out of His mind.'" They keep on saying He is crazy, or a lunatic. Maybe they are concerned that Jesus was not taking care of Himself, or perhaps He is bringing shame onto the family by His actions. The point these two verses make is that Jesus' own family misunderstands the work of God through Him. Take this in. This includes Mary. It doesn't necessarily mean she doesn't have faith, but there is at least enough hesitation that she doesn't stop His brothers from going out to seize Him. And his brothers had to have known the stories surrounding His birth and prophecies made over him, right? My wife will attest that I have a horrible memory when it comes to my childhood, so I can understand not remembering things. However, I do have some memories, mainly because there are stories that my parents tell repeatedly when we get together. This happens in every family, right? Parents, or grandparents, recount the same stories when everyone gets together. Don't give your parents too hard of a time right now kids, that will be you some day. But seriously, the things from Jesus' birth had to have been one of those recounted stories, right? Even if they weren't, think about all they have seen Jesus say and do.

Yet even those supposed to be closest to Jesus misunderstand the work of God through Him. It is easy for us to do the same. This leads into the second scene, as the problem builds in verses 22-30, revealing how,

IT IS DANGEROUS TO CONTINUALLY AND WILLFULLY REJECT THE WORK OF GOD THROUGH JESUS

One of the most important things for us to see is the way Mark connects these two stories, not only through the sandwiching technique, but even the language use. Notice the way verse 22 connects with verse 21, “And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, ‘He is possessed by Beelzebul,’ and ‘by the prince of demons he casts out the demons.’” Do you see the parallels? Jesus’ family “were saying, ‘He is out of His mind,’” and the scribes “were saying, ‘He is possessed by Beelzebul.’” It is the same Greek tense signifying they were continually saying this. Mark is showing point that the response of Jesus’ family is not that different from these scribes. Yes, as we will see, there is a difference, but both are problematic. The scribes are the religious police charged with ensuring everyone held to the teaching of the Torah and honored God. They have come from Jerusalem with some serious accusations. First, “He is possessed by Beelzebul.” This is likely a common colloquialism to refer to Satan as the ruler of demons. We know that because of their second accusation, saying “by the prince of demons he casts out the demons,” and Jesus’ reference of Satan following this. Note an important thing in these charges. They aren’t denying Jesus’ miracles. They have seen and acknowledge Jesus’ power and they can’t deny that. There is an implication here. Sometimes we may be tempted to think that if we or someone else could just see God’s miraculous power, it would be impossible to not believe in Jesus. Church, the gospels show over and over again that is simply not true. Many saw the power of God on display through Jesus and they still did not believe. Don’t fall into the trap of thinking those if only statements. Share the word of the cross, share the gospel, and know that a work of the Spirit is needed to change hearts, not merely a display of miracles and power. Though God provides that at time. The greatest miracle of God is our changed hearts. Let’s get back to our text. Notice how Jesus responds, pick back up with me in verses 23-26, “And he called them to him and said to them in parables, “How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end.” The question is clear, how, or why would Satan cast out Satan? As New Testament scholar Clinton Arnold says well, “Satan extends his kingdom by sowing chaos and enslaving humans, not by setting them free” (Arnold, Mark, 26). Satan’s goal is to build his kingdom on earth by enslaving humans to his ways and he would be foolish to set them free. Each if/then statement expounds on this. If a kingdom is divided, then it can’t stand. If a house is divided, then it can’t stand. And if Satan is divided against himself, then “he cannot stand, but is coming to and end.” Jesus drives the truth home in verse 27 by pointing to who He is and what He is doing in. Look there with me. “But 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.” Satan is the strong man being bound. Satan’s house is the house being plundered. And it is being plundered by someone stronger than he is. This alludes back to Mark 1:7 of someone mightier than John the Baptist coming. Jesus is saying He has come with the power to bind Satan and plunder his kingdom. Satan isn’t against himself, but rather Satan’s kingdom is coming to an end. It’s no accident that Mark’s first recorded miracle is the casting out of a demon. It’s also no accident that Mark only records the apostles being given authority to cast out demons and other gospel writers include healing diseases. Mark’s wants us to see the battle in the spiritual realm that has been won by Christ. 1 John 3:8 says “the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.” Jesus came and has plundered his house through the work He accomplished. That is the truth of the gospel and ringing from this statement in verse 27. Mankind was held captive under the influence of Satan. Ephesians 2 says we all were spiritual dead, following Satan to destruction. But Christ as the one who is mightier has plundered His house, and God makes us alive when we trust in Christ’s finished work on the cross and His victorious resurrection. This truth is extended into verse 28, and coupled with a warning in verses 29-30.

Look there with me, “Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter.” Just stop for a moment and take that in before we get into verse 29. All sins will be forgiven. This doesn’t mean sins will be forgiven without repentance, but all will be forgiven by those who do repent. What a glorious truth! Don’t miss that and move too quickly into the questions surrounding verse 29. Let that sit on your heart the way it is intended to. All your sin, past, present, and future will be forgiven through Christ when you turn and trust in Him. So, turn and receive that forgiveness. Now, consider verses 29-30 with me, making sure you keep them together. “but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness but is guilty of an eternal sin’— for they were saying, ‘He has an unclean spirit.’” Verse 29 has haunted many people, and in some ways it should. There is a sin that is an eternal sin that will not receive forgiveness. That is a somber reality that should stop us in our tracks. Jesus describes it as “blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.” William Lane explains this better than I can saying, “Blasphemy is an expression of defiant hostility toward God ... This is the danger to which the scribes exposed themselves when they attributed to the agency of Satan the redemption brought by Jesus. The expulsion of demons was a sign of the intrusion of the Kingdom of God. Yet the scribal accusations against Jesus amount to a denial of the power and greatness of the Spirit of God. By assigning the action of God to a demonic origin the scribes betray a perversion of spirit which, in defiance of the truth, chooses to call light darkness. In this historical context, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit denotes the conscious and deliberate rejection of the saving power and grace of God released through Jesus’ word and act” (William Lane, *The Gospel According Mark*, 145–146). We should heed this warning. We should see and acknowledge that the work Christ did was the very work of God. Yet, we should be careful not to let this haunt us as believers. Pay attention to the reason in verse 30, as it is vital to understand. Maybe you notice the similarity with verses 21 and 22. The phrase “for they were saying,” is in the same Greek tense signifying a continual and persistent comment. This was a fixed decision on their part. This is an important to see for those with sensitive consciences in this room. Do not be plagued by whether you have committed this sin. The very fact that you are concerned shows you haven’t. Trust to Jesus Christ and His power to forgive. Acknowledge the work of God through Him. Yes, there is a danger in continually and willfully denying the work of God through Jesus revealed through this story, but there is grace to the darkest heart who turns and acknowledges Christ’s work on the cross as sufficient for them. This brings us to the final scene that gives us the truth the scenes have been building towards,

WE MUST FULLY EMBRACE THE WORK OF GOD THROUGH JESUS

As we saw, these stories are connected to show us how the response of Jesus’ family is not far from the response of the scribes. Both kinds of responses are called to turn and repent. Notice again what Mark says in verse 31-32, “And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, ‘Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you.’” Don’t miss the subtle allusion in Mark’s writing here. Jesus’ family, those supposed to be closest to Him, the ones on the inside track through blood relationship are “standing outside,” while others are inside with Jesus. From this moment, we begin see that blood relationship does automatically give you entrance into the kingdom of God. It is only available to those of faith, those who follow Jesus. We see this clearly as Jesus responds to the notice of His family seeking Him in verses 33-35. Look there with me. “And he answered them, ‘Who are my mother and my brothers?’ And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.’” Jesus’ response was particularly shocking for the culture of that day. Jewish culture was both family-centered and ethnicity-centered. Yet, Jesus says it is not His family who are His mother and brothers, but those who are with Him inside the room. And he further qualifies who that is as “whoever does the will of God.” Jesus is forming a new society, a new family, the family of God. A family that doesn’t depend on paternal connection or ethnic heritage, but on being with Jesus, being in His presence, and following the will of God.

The familial concept here is important to understand because obedience in a family should never come out of efforts to earn love but as a response to love. Our obedience to God's will doesn't start the relationship with God, only faith does that. Our obedience is a sign of the relationship we have through faith. So, what does it mean to do the will of God? Staying within the context of what we have seen in Mark and what follows about the kingdom of God, this is primarily means responding to the person and message of Jesus as God's plan for salvation and His kingdom. Then, if we look throughout the scriptures, we could see other things it means. Romans 12:1-2 says it means we present our bodies as a living sacrifice, are transformed in our thinking, and don't conform to the world around us. Ephesians 6:6 says it means we do all our work to please Christ. In 1 Thessalonians 4:3, it means we pursue sanctification, specifically abstaining from sexual immorality. In 1 Thessalonians 5:18, it means we give thanks to God for everything. 1 Peter 4:2 says it means we live for God and not our human desires. And 1 John 2:15-17 says it means we don't love the things of this world but love and follow God. There is one more thing I want to point out we see from our passage that will be revisited later in Mark 10. Doing God's will may mean adjusting or even losing relationships with our earthy family for the sake of our eternal and heavenly family. Think about how Jesus is identifying all who follow Him as a family. This signifies that there should be a close and familial relationship between all who are bound closely to Jesus. Church, the people around you who believe and follow Christ should be seen as close as your family. This means we should prioritize relationships with each other in the same way we prioritize our biological family. We live in relationship with them like we do our families. We desire to know, love, and encourage them like we do our families. That is what it means to be part of the family of God, and part of a church family, because that is what all of eternity will be like. Listen to what Jesus will say to the disciples when they speak about leaving everything to follow Him, including family in Matthew 10:29-30, "Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life." Fully embracing Jesus means desiring to be with Him in His presence and following the will of God in everything He calls you to say and do, both in your life personally and with your relationships. These stories show us that misunderstanding the work of God through Jesus is ultimately just as problematic as continually and willfully denying it, as both Jesus' family and the scribes are contrasted in this moment with those who remain with Jesus and do the will of God.

Conclusion:

Church, as we conclude our time together, let the need to fully embrace Jesus sink in, because next week's passage is going to drive that home even deeper. Press into all that God has for you in Jesus Christ. The truth is Jesus Christ and His ways will bring you more joy now, and for all eternity, than any earthy joy you can experience. As the worship team is coming to lead us in responding to these truths from God's word, how is God encouraging you to respond? Maybe He is calling you to embrace Jesus Christ and the gospel for the first time today. To see your sin and turn to trust in the death of Jesus on the cross for your forgiveness and find the victory He provides through His resurrection. Maybe you are being called to desire the presence of Jesus more and rearrange your schedule to have more time with Him. Maybe God is challenging you to walk more according to His will. To confess sin and put it away from you. To no longer love the things of this world. To work harder for the glory of Christ. Maybe He is calling you to see the church as family and prioritize the community here more in your life. Maybe the call is to be willing to lose everything for the glory of Jesus. Whatever it may be, press into His leading today. If you need prayer for anything, we have a team of people ready to pray for you and with you. They will be in the front rows and at the bottom of the stairs worshipping with lanyards on for you to find them if you have any need.

Let's pray together as we seek God's grace in our time of response.