

Dr. Mark Jennings, Mark, Lecture 7, Mark 3:20-35, Family and Enemies

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This is Dr. Mark Jennings in his teaching on the Gospel of Mark. This is session 7, Mark 3:20-35, Family and Enemies.

So, we're back and still working on Mark chapter 3. We just got done looking at the healing on the Sabbath and the summary statements of Mark 7 through 12 and then the choosing of the 12.

Now we get to a part of Mark, Mark 3 20 through 35, that is extremely Markian. By that, I mean you can see the heavy presence of Mark's hand even in the structuring of the passage. One of the things we notice in the Gospel of Mark is that Mark is making choices.

We talked about this in the very beginning of our discussion, but that Mark isn't simply regurgitating anything and everything that he knows, but he's making choices. It was common in ancient historiography to arrange events to help convey a message or a theme or a topic. That you couldn't create an event whole cloth, you couldn't write fiction, but you could manipulate the sequence of events to convey something.

And we see a really good example in Mark 3:20 through 35. In fact, what we see is often referred to as a Markian sandwich. The idea of a Markian sandwich, or intercalation if you want the official term, but the idea of a Markian sandwich is Mark begins an account, begins a story, a piece of bread, and into the telling of that story, he inserts a second story.

We'll call this the meat. He tells that second story completely, and then he returns to the first story and finishes it. So, he turns to the piece of bread.

And so that's why it's called a sandwich because you have one story that's bracketing a second story. And a clear example of this is what we have here in Mark 3:20 through 35. So, for example, if I begin with verse 20, 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. Now if I jump all the way down to verse 31, 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. Who are my mother and 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 mother, is my brother, and sister, and mother. Now that is one story. This account of this situation of Jesus in this house, the family going there, the people seeing the family there, telling Jesus about their families outside looking for him and him making the statement about who is actually his family.

And we'll come back to all of that. But that's one story, yet it is interrupted. That story is interrupted from verse 20 to verse 30 with this account, this interaction between Jesus and the Pharisees, his accusation that he's in league with Beelzebub, and so forth.

So, Jesus's interaction with the Pharisees is a completely different event. There's no indication that that is happening in the house. This is a separate event that Mark has inserted into the family account.

So, the question, of course, is always why? The general thought on this literary device is seen in Marks 5:21-43, Mark 11, and Mark 14. So, we see him do this elsewhere. The general consensus of why Mark does this is because he wants these two events to mutually interpret each other, often with the meat, the interrupter, the clear choice to interrupt the storytelling by Mark being the stronger scene, the one that is informing the most or has the stress.

And so, I want us to sort of think through this Mark and sandwich. And we're going to think through it in a way that allows these two different accounts, these two different pericopes, to exist as they are in Mark as a single unit. And I think we'll see that the meat component is the theological key to the flanking halves.

Now as we look at this, as we look at this passage, it starts out, this first piece of bread, starts out with when Jesus entered a house and again a crowd gather. Most likely what we're looking at here is probably points to Peter's home, this language of again, that seems to be the house that he keeps coming back to. It would have been a place that they would have known to be there.

And there's a crowd, and as we see in the Gospel of Mark, we see it frequently. What do crowds do? They get in the way. What are they doing here? They're preventing eating. There's such a crowd that they're not even able to eat.

When his family heard about this, presumably hearing about Jesus being at this house and being present, they went to take charge of him. The idea of being taking charge of him is that they're going to him to make him stop what he's doing. There's something about what he is doing that is bringing shame to the family.

In an honor-shame culture in the ancient world, family members either gave family members honor or gave them shame. You infected each other. And so, what they're worried about probably at this point is here is Jesus, who is now saying things about himself and having the power to forgive sins.

He's been saying he's Lord of the Sabbath. He's been provoking the enmity of the religious leaders. We talked about that with the withered hand but also the accusations he's been leveling against them.

He's been declaring people don't have to fast in his presence. So, he's been disallowing the practice of fasting around him. He's been all these things that will unsettle his family.

For now, his family is being accused of. Aren't you the family of this guy who is doing these things yet also saying these things? And they want him to stop, and they've come to the conclusion that he's out of his mind. They're coming to the conclusion that the reason Jesus is doing these things is he simply is no longer controlling his mental faculties. He's crazy.

That's important to keep note of what they think is going on with then what the religious leaders are saying is going on. They see what Jesus is doing and they think this is wrong, this shouldn't happen, he must be out of his mind. The religious leaders are going to say something extremely different.

And it is at this point, when he is out of his mind, that Mark interrupts the story. 22. And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem, and that's important, that bit of note, they've come down from Jerusalem.

Now you always come down from Jerusalem. Wherever you're going, you come down from Jerusalem. One, this is the idea of the theological significance of Jerusalem, but also geographically it was elevated, it was higher.

But one always came down from Jerusalem. But it's important, these teachers of the law are not just the local ones. They're coming from the seat of power.

Jerusalem was the seat of religious power, the great city of God, and they are the ones who have come down.

And they're coming down to level accusation. They come down and they ask the question, or they make the statement rather, he is possessed by Beelzebub, by the prince of demons, he is driving out demons. Notice here that there's no specific exorcism in view.

They're not talking about a specific event. They're talking about his power over demons. That when they consider the amazing authority, and we've seen evidence throughout chapters 1 through 3 of Jesus' authority over demons, the summary statements that whenever he showed up, demons would fall down and he would tell them to be quiet.

We saw this with Capernaum and the casting out and then the reference that he cast out many demons. And so you've got this scene where Jesus is showing such an amazing authority over demons. And not just one demon or two demons, but the many that is occurring here.

And the religious leaders of Jerusalem have gotten wind of this, and they're now declaring why he is able to do it. And they issue two accusations against Jesus. They give two explanations.

Notice the first one, he is possessed by Beelzebub, perhaps Beelzebul. Not clear, not really sure even how this idea is. Lord of the flies, Lord of the house.

It's clear they understand it to be this prince of demons, this Satan figure. And then how Jesus responds indicates that they're understanding it to be a Satan figure. And the Beel references are interesting when you think about two, just Second Kings 1, for example.

But so the first charge is he's possessed. But then the second one, there's a second charge there. And that is by the prince of demons, he is driving out demons.

And the way that that charge seems to read is no longer that he's simply possessed by it, but that it has almost this idea of working with the ruler of demons. The sense is that they're saying Jesus is possessed by. Now, think about the language of possession.

We've seen people who are possessed are saying things that they're not able to say. They're doing things, you know. The demons are doing things through them. That's what we saw.

When the demons spoke, it wasn't the possessed man's faculty that was speaking. It was the demon speaking through the man. But by going with this language of he is possessed by this power he's doing it, it makes this move, it makes this transition of not just saying, well the reason Jesus can do this is that Beelzebul's in him.

And he's unable to really control what he's doing. It actually moves into the language of participation. That somehow he's participating with it.

And this is an elevated charge. This is an interesting tension, right? The family thought he was mad, and perhaps mad could be associated with being possessed. But this idea of by the power he's doing it, that language is sort of to explain that he has that authority, he has that power, not just the power working through him.

The charge then is that Jesus is not an innocent victim that himself needs to have demons cast out, but rather that he's deliberately participating. I think that also explains the response that Jesus gives. So here is their explanation.

Their explanation for why Jesus is able to have such authority over demons is because he belongs and is working with Beelzebul. So, Jesus summoned them and spoke to them in parables. Interesting enough, outside of Mark 4, when Jesus speaks in parables in the Gospel of Mark, it is usually in an debating, rebuking fashion.

Mark 4 is a little bit different there. The essence of his argument, which we'll walk through, is that the explanation that the religious leaders are giving is absurd. That's the initial response that Jesus gives.

It's absurd to say that Satan is working with and through Jesus to cast out demons. That's a ridiculous suggestion. So, he asks, how can Satan drive out Satan? And then he gives two parables.

If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. It's interesting on these two parables.

There's some debate: is this a major minor, or is this a way of saying the same thing? In other words, is Jesus saying that if a kingdom, a broad political unit, is divided against itself, that means that kingdom is over? That kingdom will split. It won't sustain.

The same is true with your house if it has that same. So, it's possible that's a major-minor, that this is a principle that's in place that is true for kingdoms, and it's also true for the home. Or is this saying the same thing? This means a house, as in a dynasty house or a house of a ruler, and he's saying the same thing.

I tend to think it's a major-minor argument, but there's an interesting word, house, that could also be used to describe a ruling house. And so we have this parable, these two illustration parables that are put in, that basically says this is a soon-known reality, that a kingdom divided against itself will see the result in the ending of the disillusion of it. This would be a horrible strategy for Satan to be using to advance his own purposes to divide and attack himself.

This is an illogical reason. And then in verse 26, if Satan opposes himself, meaning if what you say is true and is divided, this is a very unique way of saying, all right, let's

assume something to be true that we all know is not. That's the type of the argument.

We know this is not true, but let's just say it was. If Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand. His end has come. If what you were saying, in other words, if Jesus is casting out demons, is going against the spread of Satan's kingdom at Satan's design, then actually what that means is Satan's rule's over.

I mean, there's a bit of irony. If this was true, then Satan actually was actively pursuing his own end. And so again, he puts this out, and he says, I'm sure you don't agree with that.

I'm sure you don't think that is what Satan is trying to do. So, he tells the religious leaders, your accusation against me, his first response is to challenge the logic of their argument that their logic is simply recognizable as foolish.

It's interesting because there's a line here drawn. Remember back to in the synagogue, when he says, when he asks, you know, which is lawful to do on the Sabbath? To do good or to do evil, to save a life or to kill. And the religious leaders remain silent. They did not want to affirm Jesus' argument in any way.

And here we sort of get an escalation of that, that they'd be willing to even pursue an absurd argument. If their silence was evidence of the hardness of the hearts, that's why Jesus was angry. How much more so is this argument, this accusation, evidence of their hardness? In fact, that's exactly what we're going to see when Jesus plays through and continues it. And so, he begins first by indicating its illogic.

But Jesus doesn't stop there. He then offers the reason, excuse me, the reason for the exorcisms. I mean, the question is still, how is Jesus able to do this? They've offered an absurd suggestion, Jesus then explains with 27.

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. That's his explanation.

He gives an explanation for what is occurring. Now, understand here the strong man in this analogy, the picture of what is happening, because the question is, how is someone able to do this many exorcisms? How is someone able to cast this many demons so completely and so fully out of someone? Well, the explanation that Jesus is providing is this picture of a strong man. And no one can enter the house of a strong man and take the belongings from that strong man unless he first binds him, unless he is, in fact, stronger.

So, in this analogy, or in this picture that Jesus is putting, the strong man is Satan. He has this house, these people. He has all of the belongings.

He has full control of them. And no one can take anything from the strong man unless he is in fact stronger than the strong man and can subdue and bind him. So, in this picture, which this picture is a robbery of a strong man, the picture that's being painted is Jesus is saying, I am going into the house of the strong man, and I am binding him, and I am stopping him, and then I'm taking what I want.

That is how this analogy works. And so, and this fits, right, this fits with our first presentation of who Jesus is. The first presentation of who Jesus is, is that Jesus is the stronger one.

That's what John the Baptist described him as. He is the one stronger than me. The logic, then, Jesus' exorcism, shows that he has subdued Satan.

So, Satan has, indeed, his power, and his rule has indeed come to an end. But not because of the suggestion of the religious leaders, that the kingdom of Satan is falling because it's divided against itself. What Jesus is saying, no, the kingdom is falling, the kingdom of Satan is stopping because Jesus is simply stronger.

That he is stronger than Satan. In Isaiah 49:24 through 26, I think also kind of plays into this. You know, you have this idea too of Jesus setting the captives free.

The ones who are possessed are captive, and he sets them free. You know, the Isaiah passage, will anyone take spoils from a mighty one? And if one should take a captive unjustly, shall he be saved? Thus says the Lord, if one should take a mighty one captive, he will take spoils, and by taking them from a strong one, he will be saved. And I will judge your cause, and I will rescue your sons.

And those who are afflicted, you shall, those who afflicted you shall eat their own flesh, and they shall drink their own blood like new wine to be drunk. Then all flesh shall perceive that I am the Lord who rescued you, who assists the strength of Jacob. I think this passage from Isaiah 49 plays a big role in this.

Where Jesus is enacting the taking of the spoils from the one who has taken the others captive. That Jesus is the one who has the strength of Jacob. And all shall know that the Lord has rescued you.

We see that in the exorcisms of Mark. We see that all the way through that, that Jesus' fame of being the one who has been able to cast out all these demons is being made known. In fact, we will see Jesus himself will say such statements very similar to the Lord is the one who rescued you.

So, you have a hint here. So, in Isaiah, that is God who's doing that rescuing. Here it is Jesus who is doing.

So, Jesus is doing the work of God that is presented in Isaiah. And this exorcism of the demons then becomes a salient example that the kingdom of God has come. That the sovereign power of God has come in Jesus.

So, I think it's fascinating. Now, this binding language, maybe just a small point here, where it says unless he binds. I think that is not some sort of ritualistic declaration.

This idea of I bind you. I think it's really just a parable explaining strength. And we always have to be careful when we see illustrative parables.

Things that are conveying a picture. That we then literalize the picture. And we make it into some sort of ritual.

In fact, most of the references to binding demonic powers in Jewish literature actually often refers to eschatological judgment. Satan is bound for a thousand years, for example. And so, when we see binding language, that language is the language that is often associated with victory and authority, not method.

The context shifts, though. There are a couple of places you could have expected this account to change, for example, or to end.

You could have expected it to end simply at the showing of the absurdity of their logic. But it didn't end there. It ended with Jesus going the next step and explaining how these demons are being exercised.

But it doesn't end there. Jesus then moves in the conversation to issue his own accusation and judgment. So, it starts with religious leaders accusing Jesus of being in league with Beelzebul.

It ends with Jesus now accusing them. There's judgment language, very strong judgment language. Verse 28, I tell you the truth.

By the way, that's a common way of introducing, especially in the Gospel, Jesus of saying, here comes a verdict. 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 had an evil spirit.

That bit isn't important. So, you know, he does this type of argument where it goes the all but one argument. This is a very common form of arguing in Second Temple Judaism, where all except this.

And so, he does all sins and blasphemies will be forgiven. And the question is, of course, to what extent does he mean blasphemies? What is happening there? All these things will be forgiven, their sins and the blasphemies, whatever they might blaspheme. There's this future idea of forgiveness.

And so, blasphemy, by particular form of elevated sins, is very difficult because blasphemy could be used in this time period for a wide variety. There could be a high charge, but it also could be a lower charge. Probably this this idea of blasphemy might have to speak slanderously, perhaps to speak slanderously of others, or maybe to speak slanderously of God.

It might be this idea. The structure is clearly the focus on blasphemy. And so Jesus makes this statement about the possibility of forgiveness.

So, for one thing, he makes this beautiful statement about all the sins and all the blasphemies, like the extent of the forgiveness that will be available. But that's not the main point. The main point is to highlight the judgment that is being made.

So, he sets this stage and says that although the great canopy of sins and blasphemies, they will be forgiven. I mean, and this isn't the place where you say, ah, so there's universal forgiveness. No, that's not the logic of the argument.

The logic is not manner, method, or process. The logic is quality. The great quality of sins is available for forgiveness.

Forgiveness is available to them, except one. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven. He is guilty of an eternal sin.

He says this because they are saying he has an evil spirit. Now this reference, he said this because they said he has an evil spirit. That is a very important part of this passage, because that reference is explaining what Jesus means by blasphemy of the Holy Spirit.

There is no shortage of discussion on what constitutes blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. I remember, as a little kid when I grew up in a home that went to church and read the Bible; I was very blessed to have that as an upbringing. I remember reading this and freaking out, becoming very nervous.

Had I done this? You know, this is unforgivable. I was about nine years old, and I'm sitting there, we have this great theological crisis, and of course, anyone who's had that theological crisis, usually the phrasing that you get from someone is, well, if you wonder if you've done it, then you haven't done it. That was sort of the voice of comfort here.

But look at what is happening. It's very specific. He is first issuing this charge against them.

The religious leaders have committed blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. He said this because they were saying he has an evil spirit. So, first of all, he said, we'll come back to what blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is here, but he first has said, what you have just done will not be forgiven.

You are now in a state where forgiveness will not come. Now, this is coming on the heels of hardness, right? And there's this, throughout the Old Testament, there is this picture of a hardness that then is solidified. That there's a hardness of heart.

Pharaoh is hardened in his heart. He has a hardness of it, and then God hardens his heart. And in fact, the hardening of Pharaoh's heart serves God's purpose of revealing who he is.

And I think the same thing is happening here, that we've gotten this declaration that Jesus has already said that he was angry at the hardness of their heart. We saw that earlier episode in the synagogue. And here, there is clear evidence that they are now in a full state of rejection, that their heart is hardened, and that they would rather look at what Jesus is doing.

And what Jesus is doing is clear evidence of the power of God. Is the power of God working against the power of Satan and winning? This was an activity that should have been affirmed as God's sovereign, that God would be given the glory, and that Jesus would be declaring to do the work of God. They would rather say, in full evidence of a massive display of God's power through Jesus, and they would rather say in full evidence of the demonic forces being beaten and people being restored.

Because remember, we're talking about people here, not just general spiritual evidence. We're talking about people's lives being restored. We'll see that very clearly when we get to the demoniac Legion.

They would rather say, that's the work of Satan, than ascribe Jesus as doing the work of God. That's what the definition of Jesus is, of what blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is. Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, then, in this context, is to say, I see Jesus doing what is a clear work of God.

Rather than affirming that God is at work in Jesus, I will affirm and state that Jesus is in league with the devil. Notice that's a very tight operational definition of blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. And so, as we, as we, whatever we say blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is, whatever application we want to make, whatever suggestion we have of how it's still occurring or not occurring, it needs to fit that standard.

It needs to fit that standard of saying clear, overwhelming, massive evidence of the power of God at work in Jesus and say that Jesus is actually doing this because he's in league with the devil. That's a very tight definition. I'm going to be very careful if we ever step outside of that definition.

But even moving back here, he has said that their statement has placed them under the full judgment, that God's judgment has now been ruled. This is not unlike the judgment language that God has against the nations in the Old Testament when he declares the judgment that is about to occur and declares the time has come. And we're going to see this judgment language against this generation, this ruling generation, even becomes more and more pronounced, especially as we get in, as Jesus gets into Jerusalem.

So here we have this incredibly powerful story of Jesus declaring judgment on this enmity. But remember, this story is an interrupter. Don't forget we started this story about Jesus in the house, and there were too many people, and they couldn't eat, and his family thought he was out of his mind, and they were coming to get him.

And then we kind of leave this little story into this big, huge conflict. We need to come back to the story of Jesus in the house. So, in verse 31, Jesus' mother and brothers arrive, standing outside.

They sent someone to call him, and a crowd was sitting around him. They told him, your mother and brothers are outside looking for you. Who are my mother and brothers, he asked.

And then he looked around 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, sister, and mother. So, it's interesting to know how we play through this. What is happening? Well, I think this whole question has been a question.

We have the calling of the 12. We've had this movement of who is those who belong to Jesus, who are the insiders, if I could use that term, and who are the outsiders. One group is clearly on the outside and declared full enmity and has received judgment because of it.

These were the religious leaders. So, here's this other picture, though, of a family member. These family members see what Jesus is doing and saying, and they think he's crazy.

Notice what doesn't happen to those family members. I just want to think about this for a second before we move into the fictive kinship idea. Jesus does not accuse his mother and his brothers of blaspheming the Holy Spirit.

There's hope there. In other words, this group who thinks Jesus is doing wrong, his blood relatives who think Jesus is out of his mind, they have not moved so far beyond in hardness of heart as to be committed that which is unforgivable. In fact, what do we know about some of his family? We know he has a brother named James.

James will receive a resurrection appearance. Jesus will appear to James. Paul tells us Jesus appeared to the apostles and then to James.

James will become one of the leaders of the Jerusalem church. The Christians in Jerusalem, Jews who are following Jesus, James will be one of their leaders. James writes James.

Jude was also his brother. Jude, who writes Jude, is also his brother. So, we know from Jesus' own bloodline, his own brothers, that they are rejecting this point, but all of them won't stay in that stance.

So, I think there's even a bit of hope there for them. But even more importantly, when Jesus is talking about who his family is, Keep in mind this is in the scene of Jesus picking the twelve of this eschatological restoration of Israel, this question of the people of God is.

Jesus issues a very strong statement that those who are his family, and when it talks about these are my mothers, my brothers, and sisters, I think the beautiful thing is he's sitting there and the people are sitting around him, and he's declaring this picture of an excluding men and women. If he was just including men, he might have only used brothers. But when he says these are my mother, my brothers, and my sisters, it's gender-inclusive of those who can belong to Jesus' people.

But notice what he's saying is it has nothing to do with blood relation. Now, this extends out then. You can extrapolate that into the Gentile mission.

It has nothing to do with ethnic identity. Only those who are doing the will of God. And so, this idea here were the religious leaders who presumably were the ones who knew and could explain what it meant to do the will of God, and they are outside.

They have been declared unforgiving, this group. They are not doing the will of God. The family members who think he's crazy are currently not doing the will of God, but there's hope still there.

Those who are sitting and listening to Jesus, to listen to Jesus, to do and to affirm Jesus is to do the will of God. The will of God is perfectly expressed by Jesus and in Jesus, and so there's this very powerful statement that kinship language is the strongest bond.

He is now taking that out of any hereditary design and putting it within just the following of what Jesus has to say. He has already said that he is the authority of the law and the scripture. So, it's very powerful this interplay between the different responses to Jesus.

There is the declaration that he is evil. There is a statement that he is confused. And then there is the, I want to hear, because Jesus is giving me and displaying the will of God.

Those are three reactions to Jesus that have not gone away, and we'll actually continue to see them throughout the rest of the Gospel of Mark. So that's Mark chapter 3. Now, when we move into Mark chapter 4, which we will do next time, we'll see with Mark chapter 4 that we'll shift into some parables and some of Jesus's teachings. We've been talking about his actions, and now we'll step into some of his teaching as well.

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