

“Family, Scandal, Blasphemy, & Forgiveness”
Series: Jesus and His Gospel: Studies in Mark – Part 9
Mark 3:20-35

Introduction: Please take your Bible and turn to Mark 3, Mark chapter 3.

There has been no doubt through our study of the Gospel according to Mark that Jesus demands a response. You cannot be exposed to His ministry, His teaching, His healing, or His exorcism of demons and be unchanged. His life was of such consequence that those who experienced Jesus were forced to respond to Him.

This is not true of any other man to the extent that it is true of Jesus. Great world leaders have had impact on many people and many have been forced to respond to them in certain ways and at certain times, but no man has demanded a response from every man and woman who has ever lived like Jesus has. This is obviously because no other world leader or influencer has been of the character and nature of Jesus. And this is what is at stake in Mark 3. Mark is writing this account of Jesus’ life under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God to make known to all generations the character and nature of this Jesus of Nazareth. Mark’s point is to make known to you and to me, and to every other generation that has spanned the time between Mark’s pen on paper and us, that Jesus is the Messiah – the promised one of God who came to be the Savior of mankind. He is not just another fizzling firecracker on the screen of human history, but rather he is the Son of God that demands a response from all who have lived, are alive, and ever will live.

In Mark 3:20-35 we see 4 different responses to this Jesus. And in each of these 4 responses we see the essential elements of all human responses to Jesus. In other words, the question before all men of all time is – What will you do with Jesus? How will you respond to Him – His person, His work, and His nature? Four possible responses to this question are before us in Mark 3 this morning.

The first group we encounter in verse 20 is the crowd.

- I. **You can respond like the Crowd – vs. 20**
 - a. This is the same crowd – the great crowd – that we saw in verses 9-10. Jesus was wildly popular with the average populace of Galilee, and they crowded around him. They heard of his healings and exorcisms. News spread fast of his authoritative teaching that was not like the Scribes and Pharisees. They saw him stand firm against the traditions of men while making clear what a true relationship with God looked like. But most of all, they had seen him meet many physical needs, and so they pressed around him to try to touch him. They just

wanted what Jesus could give them. They were after Jesus for what they could get out of him. And this was the most popular and common response for it was a *great* crowd that pressed around him in verses 9-10.

- b. Jesus wisely escapes that out of control situation and isolates himself on the mountain with the 12 men who will form the inner crowd. After appointing them and commissioning them to be his apostles they all return to Capernaum which Jesus had made his home base. And verse 20 tells us that the crowd gathered again. And their mentality has not changed. They are not gathering around Jesus to hear him speak or to grow in their understanding of His glorious nature and character. They are not pressing after Him because they are so desirous of learning how to be his disciple. They are not even interested in the Gospel of the Kingdom. They simply want from Jesus what he can give them. We know this because they wouldn't even let Jesus and the 12 apostles eat. They were a demanding crowd that overran the home as they sought Jesus for what He could do for them.
- c. Jesus was used to this response and he consistently shows compassion for those in need. He routinely heals the hardest of cases, but this response of seeking Jesus for what we can get out of him is not at the center of His Gospel. This is not why he came to Earth. He did not come to simply meet every physical need through a powerful word or a gentle touch. And so in this crowd, as you already saw in verses 9-10, this is not the response that Jesus is after to his ministry. It alarms him that so many are missing the point of his ministry and he makes wise decisions to make clear the central response he is after for His Gospel. And yet, so many during his Earthly ministry and since have missed the central point of His life and His Gospel. Many think that this Son of God has come to Earth primarily for them – to meet their every need.
- d. The response of the crowd has proven to be a patterned response of many down through the years. Even in our current day the Gospel often gets presented from pulpits as a “look what Jesus can do for you” kind of Gospel. So, the message goes something like – come to Jesus and believe on Him because then your marriage will be better and your family life will improve and your job situation will get better. Some go so far as to say that Jesus wants to give you all that you have ever wanted if you will just put your faith in Him. He wants to make you rich and he wants to heal your every disease and mend your every relationship. In this response, that we first see in this crowd in Mark 3, Jesus becomes the panacea for all of man's ills. Just run to him and it will all be better. The problem with this response to Jesus and His Gospel is that it is not a soul saving response. If Jesus simply meets the physical needs of every man, woman and child who has ever lived and never addresses their spiritual need then there is no spiritual salvation and all of this meeting of physical needs is rendered meaningless. What does it matter if you are healthy, wealthy, and wise in this life if you are in eternal damnation in the next?
- e. Recently a Seattle man saw a spider lurking in the laundry and for him this was a major problem. So much of a major problem that he decided it required the use of

a cigarette lighter and a can of spray paint. With this homemade torch in hand he hunted the spider, sprayed the flame of fire and promptly lit the wall of his laundry room on fire which quickly escalated until his whole house was engulfed. Now the small problem of a spider in the laundry had been overshadowed by the life-altering problem of his house in flames. And this is basically what the great crowd is doing with Jesus. They are concerned about the spider in the laundry while their house is burning down around them. They want Jesus to do for them what they think to be most important in the moment – they want him to kill the spider – but he is looking at their house and offering to put out the flames of eternal damnation. And yet they want from Jesus what they think is most urgent at the moment, so they press around him to force him to heal their every disease and cast out their every demon.

- f. And so, in answer to the question – what will you do with Jesus – I say to you, don't do what the crowd did in verse 20. Don't look to Jesus as someone who has the power to give you all that you want and need. Don't think that Jesus is here to serve you on your terms, when you demand, and how you require. Don't respond like the crowd.

II. You can respond like His Family – vs. 21, 31-32

- a. The second response we encounter in the text is the response of his family. Throughout Mark's telling of Jesus' life he will use a narrative technique called sandwiching where he sandwiches one event between two related events to make an overall point. That is what is happening in verses 21-35. Verse 21 tells us that Jesus' family came to seize Jesus because they had heard what he was doing and they presumed he was out of his mind. Then the narrative goes into telling us about the Scribes who came down from Jerusalem to render their verdict about Jesus – which we will talk about in a minute. And then Mark tells us again that Jesus' family – more specifically his mother and his brothers came and stood outside the door to the house seeking him. And they were not just seeking to know where he was – remember they thought he was out of his mind – so they were seeking him to get him out of there. This was an intervention expedition, not an observation expedition.
- b. By sandwiching Jesus' encounter with the Scribes from Jerusalem between the beginning of Jesus' family coming to get him and their actual attempt to remove him from the situation Mark is making an overall point. And the interpretive key to finding that overall point is found in the middle encounter – the Peanut butter and jelly of the sandwich – so to speak. And what is happening in that encounter is that the Scribes have seen the power and authority of Jesus and have attributed it to Satan. But Jesus responds by saying that Satan can't be against Satan and so therefore in verse 27 makes it plain that he has bound the strong man and is now in the process of plundering his goods. In the bread of the sandwich Jesus' family is seeking to take control of him because they think he has lost control of himself and his situation. In the middle of the sandwich Jesus proves that He is in complete authority over all evil. So, the point of the sandwich is to show you the uncontrollable power of Jesus. I do not mean that Jesus did not have control of it,

but I mean that no one else could control it. He was rightly his own boss. As Lord of Lords and King of Kings Mark makes clear by the structure of the narrative that no one can command the Lord Jesus.

- c. And in the families' response to Jesus we see their unbelief. Now we know that at some point Mary and James and Jesus' other brothers did realize that he was the Messiah and that they were to worship Him, not seek to save the family reputation by commanding his next move. But at this point in Jesus' earthly ministry they show their unbelief as they seek to rescue Jesus from himself. They knew the real Jesus and the real Jesus wouldn't act like this and so he must be stopped.
- d. And their response has been a pattern for many through the Centuries. People like to take the bits and pieces of Jesus that they like, but do away with the rest. They like to think they can control Jesus – seize him and create him to be the Lord they like the most. His family liked the Jesus they knew, but were sure the Jesus in the house in Capernaum was out of his mind. They sought to control the one who had control over all things.
- e. And so the second answer in the text to question – what will you do with Jesus? – is found in the response of Jesus' family. Don't think that you can command His authority and His nature and make him into the kind of Lord you want him to be. He must be taken as he is. He must be allowed to truly be the Lord with all authority that he really is. He must be taken on His terms, not on yours.

III. You can respond like the Scribes – vs. 22-30

- a. The third and most startling response we encounter in the text is found in verses 22-30. The Scribes descend from Jerusalem to Capernaum to render their verdict on this Jesus of Nazareth. You will remember that at the end of chapter 1 we talked about the healing of the leper and how the Scribes and Pharisees considered the healing of a leper to be a miracle that only the Messiah could do. So, they came to investigate this Jesus of Nazareth to see whether or not he could possibly be the true Messiah. But all of chapter 2 and the beginning of chapter 3 was filled with conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders because they thought he would be the preeminent Pharisee and uphold all of their religious traditions set in place by men because they believed that those religious traditions had been given to them by God. And so they wondered why Jesus would have a vile tax collector be one of his disciples. They wondered why Jesus would eat with publicans and sinners. They wondered why Jesus didn't instruct his disciples to fast every week like the Pharisees did. They wondered why Jesus' disciples picked and ate grain from the fields on the Sabbath. And Jesus wondered if they thought he shouldn't heal the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath day. All of this controversy was enough evidence for the Scribes and Pharisees that indeed this Jesus simply cannot be the Messiah because he did not fit into their preconceived idea of what the Messiah was going to be and do. And so, they render their decision – he must be doing all of these powerful works by the power of Satan.

- b. Before we get to Jesus' response to this blasphemous accusation we must notice that these Scribes did not deny that Jesus was indeed doing powerful and miraculous things. They did not deny his works, but rather in the face of these works they attributed them to Satan. Which makes known to us that faith is not a matter of evidence. The Scribes had all the evidence they needed and they didn't deny the works of proof that were in Jesus' life. They simply determined that this proof must be attributed differently than Jesus was claiming. You see faith is not a matter of proof. Some would like to think that if they could just see Jesus then they would believe. Or if they could just experience one of his miracles then they would believe. And yet in the Scribes we see the truth. Proof does not guarantee saving faith. Proof simply demands a decision by the one to whom it is presented. The Scribes has seen the proof, but they decided that Jesus was not the true Son of God. They decided he was possessed by Satan.
- c. Jesus responds to this outrageous charge by reasoning with them in parables. He is not seeking to simply win an argument, but to help all men see the ridiculousness of their claims. They are saying that he is possessed by Satan, but indeed his is casting out demons. Notice the end of verse 23 where Jesus responds to their ridiculous claim by saying – how can Satan cast out Satan? This is instructive for how Jesus saw each encounter with a demon. It was not just a minion of Satan that Jesus was casting out, but each demonic encounter was Jesus versus Satan. And so this claim by the Scribes can make no sense. If Jesus is confronting Satan and winning with every exorcism, but yet he is possessed by Satan then wouldn't Satan be fighting against Satan?
- d. And so He gives 4 reasons – all interrelated - as to why this accusation cannot be true.
 - i. A Kingdom divided cannot stand – vs. 24
 - 1. In verse 24 he says that if a kingdom is divided against itself it cannot stand. We must look no farther than our own Bibles for an example of this. David's kingdom was threatened by his very own son, and this family fight rendered the kingdom inoperable and split. A King fighting against itself cannot stand. Therefore Jesus cannot be possessed by Satan.
 - ii. A house divided cannot stand – vs. 25
 - 1. Then in verse 25 Jesus says that a house divided against itself will not be able to stand either. Again David and Absalom provide the perfect illustration. Son against father destroyed the house.
 - iii. Satan divided cannot stand – vs. 26
 - 1. Then in verse 26 Jesus makes it plain by saying that if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end. So, if indeed Jesus is possessed by Satan then Satan has risen up against himself and through Jesus is destroying his own kingdom of darkness and evil. This is ridiculous, ludicrous, illogical, and downright silly.

- iv. Therefore, the strong man must be bound because his house is being plundered by Jesus! – vs. 27
 1. Therefore the obvious conclusion is given by Jesus in verse 27 in the form of a parable. No one can enter a man's house when he is stronger than you and start plundering his stuff. He will stop you at the entrance and overcome you with his strength. But if you are stronger than him, then you can bind him and plunder his house. And indeed, the fact that Jesus defeated Satan in the temptations in the wilderness back in chapter 1 made known to us for sure that Jesus is more powerful than Satan and in his ministry he was plundering Satan's goods. He was rescuing those that Satan possessed and controlled for evil purposes. Jesus was casting those demons out and he was calling those freed from Satan to believe on Him.
- e. So it is obvious that this accusation by the Scribes is illogical and without ground, but it is their charge nonetheless. And so Jesus responds to their condemning judgment with words of condemnation upon them. He says *this* in verses 28-30.
- f. In other words, because the Scribes attributed the powerful works of the Holy Spirit in the ministry of Jesus to Satan they had committed an eternal sin that would never find forgiveness. These are scary words that can cause quite a turmoil in our soul. We can easily misinterpret these words of Christ and dream up some circumstance in which we are convinced we blasphemed the Holy Spirit and are therefore never able to be forgiven. So, is this possible? Can we today commit this eternal sin that will never find forgiveness?
- g. Some have answered that question by saying the chief sin of the Scribes in these verses is unbelief and so therefore the person who never believes in Jesus will not find salvation from their sin. Well, that statement is true, but it cannot be explicitly drawn from this text. Unbelief is a sin that will eternally condemn a soul to Hell, but we know that to be true from many other passages of Scripture.
- h. Others have answered this question about whether or not we can commit this unpardonable sin by saying that in this passage there is a national rejection by Israel of the True Messiah and this is the central point of their blasphemy and of Christ's condemnation. Therefore unless you were in that very generation of Jews you cannot commit this eternal sin that will never find forgiveness. This too, I believe, is too simplistic of an answer and one that reads too much into the text. Certainly the Scribes represent the nation in that how the Scribes go so will go the nation. So there are certainly national overtones to this incident as the Scribes represent the leadership of the people. In other words, this is not just a personal rejection of the Messiah by these specific scribes, but this is also the seedling form of the national rejection that will grow and blossom over the next two years to the point of the nation crying out – Crucify Him, Crucify Him! But this is not the idea that is addressed in Jesus words condemning the Scribes in these verses.

- i. What is happening is that these Scribes are literally speaking of the Holy Spirit with such blasphemous words that they are showing hearts solidified in their unbelief and so brazen in their passing of judgment against God that they cannot be forgiven. You see, God the Father has sent the Son into the world. He has publicly declared Jesus of Nazareth to be His Son with whom He is well pleased at his Baptism by John. Also at that Baptism we are told that the Holy Spirit of God descended upon Jesus like a dove and the insinuation from the text is that the Holy Spirit then indwelt Jesus and guided and empowered his earthly ministry. This Holy Spirit was sent by the Father upon the Son so as to give the power necessary to prove that Jesus was not just a man, but he was the God man who had come into the world to save sinners. The Holy Spirit directed and empowered Jesus to heal the leper and the paralytic and the man with the withered hand. The Holy Spirit guided and enabled Jesus to speak authoritative words over the demonic spirits that were tormenting men and women of his day. The Scribes had seen this with their own eyes. They had watched Jesus say – stretch out your hand, and the withered hand instantly heal and stretch out. They had watched Jesus say to the paralytic – rise, take up your bed and walk – and then they watched this man walk out proving he was healed. The Holy Spirit had effectively and undoubtedly witnessed to them that Jesus was God.
- j. And yet, here stand the Scribes declaring in the face of this undeniable proof provided by the Spirit of God that they think this power was not from the Holy Spirit but from Satan himself. The seriousness of this blasphemy against the Spirit of God draws these words of condemnation from Jesus. The hardness of heart and the callousness of soul that was present in these Scribes to be able in the face of great works to say they were from the Devil makes sure that they are cemented in their sin and there is no hope for them turning to the True Messiah to save them.
- k. And so, in answer to the question – can we commit this eternal sin that cannot be forgiven – we must say that unless we were able to see the Spirit’s work in confirming Jesus as the True Messiah and in the face of that undeniable truth attribute those works to Satan then we cannot be guilty of this eternal sin that is beyond forgiveness. Well, since Jesus is no longer on Earth performing these miraculous works then it is not possible for us to attribute them to Satan. So, no, we cannot commit this eternal sin like the Scribes did in these verses.
- l. But these verses are not just here in the Scriptures to make the Scribes look bad. They are here for our profit. They are intended by God to warn us that a response like theirs is unacceptable. You see the Spirit has been active in this world testifying of Jesus. The very ministry he had in making Jesus’ power and nature known continues to this very day as he convicts men of sin, removes spiritual blindness so that men can see that indeed this Jesus is the Christ. And so the warning from this text to your heart and mine is do not respond like the Scribes did to the work of the Holy Spirit in your life. Your rejection of the Spirit’s work will not be the unpardonable sin like in these verses, but continual rejection of the Spirit’s ministry will bring the condemnation of the soul.

- m. Maybe the Spirit has been at work in you for a long time and you have ignored his ministry of testifying to you that Jesus is he Christ and that you need His forgiveness. Maybe you have been under the convicting work of the Spirit for months or years and have simply not believed his reports about Jesus. May I remind you that it is appointed unto man to die once and after this comes the judgment. Do not deny the Spirit's testimony in your life. Do not hinder his work. Do not deny His claims about Jesus. Do not respond to Jesus like the Scribes did. Do not think that it is no big deal what you do with Jesus. Do not think of Jesus as some innocuous figure from history that must have been some great moral teacher and no more. You see, this response to Jesus is impossible.
- n. C.S. Lewis recognized that when one is faced with the claims of Jesus brought to our hearts by the work of the Holy Spirit there are only two options. In his book *Mere Christianity* he says this:
 - i. "A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."¹

IV. You can respond by doing God's Will – vs. 33-35

- a. The last response to Jesus given in the text is found in verses 33-35. As Jesus is ministering to others in the house and refuting the diabolical claims of the Scribes he receives word that his mother and brothers are there seeking him. Jesus knows that they are there because they think he needs rescued from himself and so the response in verses 33-35 is not harsh and cold, but rather it is instructive and encouraging. He responds with asking them who his mother and his brothers are. As he looks around at those who were circled around him he says that those who are here with him are his mother and brothers and then he goes on to say that those who do God's will are his brother and sister and mother.
- b. In other words, he has a new loyalty and family commitment. His mother and brothers were outside seeking him to get him to stop what he was doing. They were directly opposing the will of God by doing this. They were seeking to thwart Jesus' ministry among the people because they thought his ministry proved his lunacy. Jesus' response is that in the face of biological family that resists God's will he has found a new family fellowship in those around him who gladly do God's will. And fundamentally at this point in Jesus' ministry, God's will was to repent and believe in the Gospel which looked like radical obedience to the command of Jesus. It looked like Levi leaving his lucrative tax collecting position and abandoning it all for the sake of following Jesus. It looked like James

¹ As quoted in David Garland, *The NIV Application Commentary – Mark*, pg. 141.

and John and Peter and Andrew walking away from their fishing ministry to follow Jesus. It looked like Simon the Zealot changing his mind about what he was so zealous about and instead of being primarily interested in political issues of Zionism he was now primarily concerned with the message of Jesus the Son of God. Doing the will of God looked like a change of mind about Jesus and led to belief that he was indeed who he said he was which then produced a life of following after Jesus. This meant that they now had a new loyalty. They now were first connected to Jesus and following His lead and then they were connected to their biological families. And when those biological families stood in the way of doing God's will Jesus is making plain here that they are to be rejected for a new loyalty to Jesus Christ.

- c. How encouraging these words must have been to Mark's original recipients. Remember that Mark is most likely writing from Rome to Roman Christians. To be a Christian in Rome often meant that you lost everything. And if you lived during certain times in Rome, being a Christian meant putting yourself at great risk of death. You can imagine that unbelieving family often pled with followers of Christ as they suffered for his name. You can imagine they thought their brother or sister or mother or father was out of their mind and needed family intervention. In one account of this recorded for us in the memoirs of Perpetua we are told that she was imprisoned for refusing to sacrifice for the welfare of the emperors. Her father begged with her to change her mind knowing that she would face certain death if she continued on her current course. In his moving words he said:
 - i. "Daughter have pity on my grey head – have pity on me your father, if I deserve to be called your father, if I have favoured you above all your brothers, if I have raised you to reach this prime of your life. Do not abandon me to the reproach of men, think of your brothers, think of your mother and your aunt, think of your child, who will not be able to live while you are gone. Give up your pride! You will destroy all of us! None of us will ever be able to speak freely again if anything happens to you."²
- d. Perpetua refused the pleas of her father because she had found a new family in Christ. She refused to publicly deny her Lord and for this she was martyred. But her martyrdom was not a loss or a tragedy, but rather a family victory. She was not swayed by the powerful words of her biological father because she was overcome with a desire to do God's will – to be faithful to Jesus to the end.
- e. And Jesus says, those who do such are his brothers, his sisters, and his mother. I don't know what opposition you face in your family to walking by faith in Jesus Christ. For most of us, I am sure that there is little opposition, or at the most some uncomfortable moments or tense conversations, but nothing like what Perpetua faced. And yet, this does not diminish the call to do God's will, for in doing God's will by following Jesus as those who whole-heartedly believe His claims, we will find a new family with Him.

² As quoted in David Garland, *The NIV Application Commentary - Mark*, pg. 146.

Conclusion: So, I ask you again – what have you done with Jesus? How have you responded to His life, His teaching, and His outlandish claims? Do you believe them? Have you placed your faith in Him as your Lord and Savior? Don't respond like the crowds that looked to Jesus to meet their every immediate need thinking that Jesus had come to Earth to be there for them. Don't respond like Jesus' family who sought to take Jesus on their terms and correct Him for their own benefit. And especially do not respond to Jesus like the Scribes who wholesale rejected his life and ministry and attributed it all to Satan. Rather, respond like those closest to Jesus and do His will by repenting and believing in Jesus the Christ and find your new identity and your new family in Him. Let's pray.