

Ben Leney

Mark Exposition

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Mark 3:20-21 "Then the multitude came together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread. But when His own people heard about this, they went out to lay hold of Him, for they said, "He is out of His mind.""

We also need to say here that the other gospels do not suggest that his family think this about Jesus - For Jesus' family to declare him to be mad shows it must be authentic - 'Mark's frankness is impressive', Cranfield says.

The word for 'out of his mind' is normally translated 'amazed', but there is one place in Paul where it's used in a similar sense:

2 Cor 5:13 "For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; or if we are of sound mind, it is for you."

This could either mean 'insane', out of all proportion, or it might be connected with some kind of ecstatic experience. Gordon Fee believes it's linked to an ecstatic experience, but in Mark it's more likely to be madness.

## Jesus' Family Part One

A few remarks at this point about Jesus' family. It's likely his sisters were there too, as in v.35 Jesus refers to sisters too, but his mother as the matriarch is named. The fact Joseph his father is absent strongly suggests that Joseph was no longer alive by this point.

This is the only mention of Jesus' mother in the gospel. There IS a 'Mary the mother of James' referred to twice in the crucifixion narrative, Mark 15:40 and Mark 16:1, but Mark would not have referred to Jesus' mother so obliquely, and this most probably Jesus' aunt rather than his mother. She WAS present at the crucifixion, but those details aren't in the Markan account. It's worth pointing out that Jesus is operating from Capernaum, and appears to have completely moved away from his family in Nazareth, implying a serious rift between them.

What do we know about Jesus' brothers? It seems that he had four, and we know their names:

Matt 13:55-56 "Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this Man get all these things?""

It's likely that James was the eldest, and Joses the second eldest. These names were all very common in Jesus' time. Also that he had at least two sisters, and Bauckham thinks they may have been Salome and Mary.

The gospels give slightly different nuances in Jesus' relationship with his family, and how THEY responded to his ministry. But Richard Bauckham in his book Jude and the Relatives of Jesus in the Early Church makes two points I want to bring in here (and one a little later):

1. Jesus' relationship with his family was not entirely smooth, mainly based on Mark's gospel, but also

John 7:5 "For even His brothers did not believe in Him."

2. makes is that a number of his family ultimately joined his ministry - his mother and brothers, uncle Clopas and wife (the disciples on the road to Emmaus), and probably another aunt, had joined his followers. We read this about Jesus' brother James

1 Cor 15:7 "After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles."

This implies that James was already a believer by this point, in Bauckham's view. James, Jesus' brother belonged to the circle of disciples before Jesus was crucified, so Jesus wanted to build his faith after he rose.

Jesus' family were well-known figures in the early church, including his mother Mary and her sister. So this is more a blip during Jesus' ministry than a permanent rift.

His family are in Nazareth. Note that they have thirty miles to walk to come and fetch their wayward son.

## Beelzebub Controversy

Mark 3:22 "And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, "He has Beelzebub," and, "By the ruler of the demons He casts out demons.""

Parallel passages to the Beelzebub Controversy:

Matthew 12:22-30 and Luke 11:14-26

It's worth saying that the accounts of the Beelzebub controversy in Matthew and Luke are prefaced by a miracle, Jesus casts a demon out of a man who is mute.

Luke 11:14 -15 "And He was casting out a demon, and it was mute. So it was, when the demon had gone out, that the mute spoke; and the multitudes marveled. But some of them said, "He casts out demons by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons.""

Why doesn't Mark include a deliverance at this point?

He's already given one specific deliverance in the Capernaum synagogue, and two occasions where multiple deliverances take place, in Mark 1:34 and Mark 3:11-12. So Mark's readers know this is what Jesus does.

I enjoyed what Grace said last time that Jesus silenced the demons because he didn't want anyone to learn His identity from a demonic source. And perhaps that explains the lack of miracle in this case - the demons are the only ones in Mark's gospel so far accurately describing Jesus:

Mark 3:11 "And the unclean spirits, whenever they saw Him, fell down before Him and cried out, saying, "You are the Son of God.""

No one else is getting it, certainly not his family who think he's mad, and the scribes who claim he's in league with Satan. And the responses of the demons to Jesus simply does not fit with the claims of the scribes - the demons are shocked and startled by Jesus' presence. Perhaps because this is a dumb spirit - and it's hard to picture this dialogue occurring except off the back of an exorcism - the demon simply doesn't speak at all.

In Mark, we don't get Jesus spelling out what his power over demons means, but in Luke:

Luke 11:20 "But if I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you."

In Mark the scribes are suggesting that Jesus is possessed by Beelzebub, the prince of demons. They say in Mark 3.22 that 'he has Beelzebub'. Also Mark 3.30 'He has an unclean spirit.' In other words, the scribes are suggesting here that Jesus is actually possessed by a demon. This is slightly different in Matthew and Luke:

Beelzebub - prince of demons or 'ruler of the household'. He's in charge. The Jews did not use 'Beelzebub' to refer to Satan. It was a foreign deity, 'Lord of the flies' was a jokey translation of it. 'Lord of the dwelling' is a literal translation. In other words, Jesus is cheating, and in league with evil powers.

Note what Jesus says here:

John 14:30 "I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me."

Mark 3:23 "So He called them to Himself and said to them in parables: "How can Satan cast out Satan?"

This is new that Jesus is provoking a confrontation. He wants to talk to them. This is unprecedented so far - the closest to this sort of situation in Mark is where the Pharisees challenge the disciples 'why are you fasting?' Jesus directly responded to them there. And here in Matthew and Luke it says again 'Jesus knew their thoughts'. Jesus' divinity is coming out here.

Mark 3:24 "If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand."

What do we know about kingdoms so far?

Mark 1:15 "and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.""

Mark 3:25 "And if a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand."

This becomes smaller, and links it back to Beelzebub, Lord of the dwelling, that a house needs to be united too.

Collapse can be so sudden if there is division. It's a shocking thing. There is no division in the kingdom of God. There's one king, Jesus, and we're his subjects.

Mark 3:26 "And if Satan has risen up against himself, and is divided, he cannot stand, but has an end."

This is a conditional 'if' - Satan is not divided. We're learning that Satan is powerful and to be reckoned with. He hasn't risen up against himself - Jesus is not in collusion with him.

Chinn and Brewer - how to respond to anomalous data

1. *Ignore it* completely
2. *Reject it* by arguing the data is wrong or simply fraudulent
3. *Exclude it* by segregating theories learnt in school from everyday life
4. *Hold it in abeyance* by putting it to one side and assuming at some point in the future you'll be proved right
5. *Reinterpret it* by accepting the new data but explaining it according to our existing theory
6. Make a *peripheral change* to our existing theory without destroying its core beliefs
7. Change to a *new theory* and reject our existing hypothesis

How do the scribes fit into this? I would suggest the scribes moved through stages 1-4, as Jesus' demonstrations of his power challenged their understanding of the world - but they are doing either 2 or, charitably, 5 - reinterpreting it, suggesting it's the devil and not God.

As the greatest teacher who has ever lived, Jesus used parables as perfect examples to introduce the kingdom, especially in Mark chapter 4, but also in this mini parable of the strongman. According to Andy Tharby, a practising teacher, the best explanations / parables

- connect to something already known,
- are as simple as possible,
- appeal to the sense,
- can transfer to new situations,
- are memorable,
- come in more than one form,
- and provoke an emotional response.

Based on research from 'How to explain absolutely anything to absolutely anyone: the art and science of teacher explanations', Crown House Publishing, 2018.

So here is the self-contained parable, an illustration:

Mark 3:27 "No one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. And then he will plunder his house."

The strongman is Satan - that works. Jesus is saying, if I'm going to conquer Satan, I've got to bind him. If Jesus is capable of binding the strongman it follows that he must be stronger than him. The beautiful simplicity of this parable helps us to picture what Jesus did when he came. Andy Tharby says that perfect examples "provide an effortless shortcut to understanding." Jesus has done that here.

Satan is not cooperating with me, says Jesus. Jesus isn't saying it directly because he doesn't want everyone to know exactly who he is, because Father doesn't want him to be crucified yet.

Jesus deliberately confuses people, as he explains

Mark 4:12 "so that 'Seeing they may see and not perceive, And hearing they may hear and not understand; Lest they should turn, And their sins be forgiven them.' ""

Perhaps Jesus is encouraging those who are thinking of following him to be serious and to have to work at their faith, rather than making it too easy.

Here's the question - has Jesus bound the strong man at this point in his ministry? Is Satan restrained? Some would want to say when Jesus is tested in the wilderness, he's been bound at this point as Jesus has won. I don't hold with that. We need to bear in mind that Satan is not bound now. If we think of Satan being bound, we're likely to think of this moment:

Rev 20:2-3 "He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while."

The devil is not bound at the moment, but every deliverance that Jesus does is a loosing of a person, and a binding of the devil, a restricting of his power, and a demonstration that Satan's power has been beaten, now has a finite duration and he is under our feet - Jesus said 'It is finished' and victory was definitely won, but Satan is not completely powerless yet.

The early church continues to meet resistance from Satan even after Pentecost, for example Elymas the sorcerer in Cyprus in Acts 13:8, or the occasion where the girl follows Paul in Philippi in Acts 16:7, often when a new work is being started - but in these cases the name of Jesus triumphs.

It's incredible and a further demonstration of Jesus' divinity that when he equips the disciples, they cast out demons not by 'the Holy Spirit', but actually in His name, as Paul does to the slave girl:

Acts 16:18 "And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and

said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And he came out that very hour."

## The Unforgivable Sin

Mark 3:28-30 ""Assuredly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they may utter; but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation"—because they said, "He has an unclean spirit.""

This is the unforgivable or unpardonable sin. Cole calls this 'one of the most solemn pronouncements and warnings in the whole of the NT, coupled, with one of the greatest promises.'

Firstly, note that v.28 seems good as all sins will be forgiven, just like the paralytic. It doesn't mean that it's EASY for them to be forgiven - Jesus will have to die and rise again for it.

When Jesus says 'assuredly', it shows that what he is saying needs careful attention.

So secondly, in v 29 it talks about blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, a form of sin, that is linked to their accusation of Jesus casting out demons by Satan, and Jesus says that their stance is apparently unforgivable. Or in the AV:

| Mark 3:29 (KJV 1900)

| But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation:

Cranfield in his commentary makes this remark:

"It's a matter of great importance pastorally that we can say with absolute confidence to anyone who is overwhelmed by the fear that he has committed this sin, that the fact he is so troubled is itself a sure proof that he has not committed it." p.142 Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary on Mark, Cranfield 1959

In the 'Salvation' book, produced from Roger Price's resources, which is an excellent resource, and you can listen to the talks for this free on the CCF tapes website, so if you want to find out more about the unforgivable sin, there's a chapter on it. Roger takes about 6 pages giving background before he tackles it, so it's not possible to cover it properly in one study where it's not the only topic.

He makes this remark about the unforgivable sin:

'The unforgivable sin must be *a sin that Jesus could not and did not die for*. And the only sin that Jesus could not and did not die for...is rejection of Himself and His work on the cross...If you reject life-saving medicine when you are on your death-bed, then death is inevitable; it is not the doctor's fault.' Roger Price, **Salvation**, p.114

I'm going to quote this as I think this sums it up very well, Louis Berkhof who wrote a Systematic Theology:

It is nothing less than a decided slandering of the Holy Spirit, an audacious declaration that the Holy Spirit is the spirit of the abyss, that the truth is the lie, and that Christ is Satan. It is not so much a sin against the person of the Holy Spirit as a sin against His official work in revealing, both objectively and subjectively, the grace and glory of God in Christ. 11 Berkhof, L. (1938) *Systematic theology*. p. 253.

Berkhof again:

The sin consists in the conscious, malicious, and wilful rejection and slandering, against evidence and conviction, of the testimony of the Holy Spirit respecting the grace of God in Christ.

But as Donald English remarks, the scribes are "set on calling the Spirit's work the activity of Satan...What makes it worst of all is that these are the informed and educated religious leaders." English, D. (1992) *The message of Mark: the mystery of faith*. Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press (The Bible Speaks Today), p. 89.

## Jesus' Family Part Two

Let's move on to our final section, which is the 'sandwich' - the mother and brothers all this time been travelling the thirty miles from Nazareth:

Mark 3:31 "Then His brothers and His mother came, and standing outside they sent to Him, calling Him."

Jesus as the eldest son was the responsible man in the family, so for him to be doing such strange things is scandalous. They're outside as they can't get in due to the crowds, just like the paralysed man.

Mark 3:32 "And a multitude was sitting around Him; and they said to Him, "Look, Your mother and Your brothers are outside seeking You.""

Mark 3:33 "But He answered them, saying, "Who is My mother, or My brothers?""

Mark 3:34-35 "And He looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him, and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother.""

That little detail, that sweep, that taking in of everyone there, not just the disciples, but all those who have stopped to hear him. This is in the Galilean period of his ministry - in a couple of chapters we will see his teaching narrow down for his close disciples, but this is all his audience: 'Here are my mother and my brothers.'

This concept can only be called radical in a traditional patriarchal culture where blood is seen as thicker than water or any other substance. 11 Witherington, B., III (2001) *The Gospel of Mark: a socio-rhetorical commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., p. 159.

A further point that Bauckham makes in his book, is that Jesus expected followers to renounce family relationships, and it's fair to assume that he did the same, as we see

in this passage. Look as well at the promise later in the gospel:

Mark 10:29-30 "So Jesus answered and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall 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."

Think also of this verse:

Matt 10:37 "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me."

And even stronger than this is:

Luke 14:26 ""If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple."

| The Message of Luke (3. The Narrow Door of Commitment (14:25–32))

| Total commitment means that there is no space to squeeze through the doorway into the kingdom if we are cluttered with reservations and provisos, with ifs and buts. *Michael Wilcock, Bible Speaks Today Commentary on Luke.*

Eph 5:17-18 "Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit,"

How do we do the will of God? First we must understand it. And we become filled with the Spirit, so that it is the most exciting thing in the world to do the will of God.

In this section we've studied tonight, we have both his family and the senior members of the Jewish religion standing against Jesus and challenging him. In the middle of it Jesus comes through declaring 'I'm not interested in that. Are you with me?'

Rather like when Joshua suddenly sees a man with a drawn sword in front of him, and asks him, perhaps arrogantly, but almost certainly in the interest of self-defense: 'Are you for us or for our adversaries?'

And what is his response? We can compare Jesus' family, expecting to have an 'intervention' and to hand him an ultimatum. In the same way Jesus says to Joshua (it's a theophany):

Josh 5:14 "So He said, "No, but as Commander of the army of the Lord I have now come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped.

So must we.