

TEXARKANA REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

MARK: ENEMIES OF JESUS

MARK 3.20-35

DAVE WAGNER

1. Last week we studied Jesus' appointment of the 12; Mark was giving us a brief respite before continuing his account of opposition to Jesus. This week we return to stories of opposition, and this time around, the opposition will be more bitter and more personal.
2. We're going to see two different groups attempt to hinder Jesus in his mission. First, Jesus' own family, his mother and brothers, who come to take custody of Jesus, thinking him insane. Second, the Jerusalem scribes, who have come to begin the public controversy which will end in Jesus' death; these scribes will charge Jesus with nothing less than being possessed by Satan. Accusations can't get much worse than that.
3. Now we need to note the structure of the text before we get started. In today's text we are looking at what some call a "Markan Sandwich." A Markan Sandwich is a literary technique where Mark begins a first story, then interrupts the first story with a second story, then finishes the first story. The first story is like sandwich bread and the second story is like a slice of bologna.
4. Mark uses this technique more than the other evangelists (about 9 times), though the others use it, too. So what is the purpose of this literary device? Some say it heightens suspense as we wait for the conclusion of the first story. It is also said that the second story, the slice of bologna in the sandwich, holds the key to understanding the meaning of both stories. It seems to me that at the least we can say that sandwiching the two stories together enables us to make valuable comparisons between the two stories, and this brings out connections and ideas

which otherwise would not exist. Before we finish today, we'll consider what connections might be present in these two stories sandwiched together.

THE TEXT

1. So here's what we have: Two stories, sandwiched together, both consisting of opposition and accusation against Jesus. The first story is about his family coming to take custody of him; they believe he is insane. The second story, which is inserted in the middle of the first story, is about scribes coming from Jerusalem to accuse Jesus of being possessed by Satan.
2. We begin in v20 with Jesus returning home, probably to Peter's home, and being so thronged with crowds that he and the 12 can't even eat a meal. Apparently, Jesus' mother and brothers have heard about Jesus' fame, his teachings and his controversy with the Jewish leaders, and so they've made the trip from Nazareth to Capernaum to take custody of Jesus. Mark tells us his family was saying that Jesus is out of his mind.
3. Now notice the parallel between v21 and v22: In 21 Jesus' family were saying he's insane; in 22 the scribes were saying he is possessed by Beelzebul. Mark is aligning these accusations in order to make a comparison between these two opposing groups. This is surprising, since we aren't used to thinking of Jesus' family as his opponents, and certainly it's a shock to think of them as aligned with people who call Jesus demon possessed. But we need to see right away that the attempt to stop Jesus in his mission, however seemingly benign, amounts to serving the devil.
4. Maybe that sounds too strong? Can we really say Jesus' family is just as much a devilish obstacle to Jesus as the blaspheming scribes? Listen: Everyone who seeks to turn Jesus aside from his mission is working for the devil, at least at that moment. Let me give you a stronger example: In chapter 8 Jesus will predict his death, and Peter will respond by rebuking Jesus for such a prediction. Peter refuses to allow

such a possibility; it's as if Jesus is walking a path that leads to the cross and Peter comes and sets himself in Jesus' way, preventing his further progress.

5. How does Jesus respond? By rebuking Peter, calling him "Satan", and ordering him out of Jesus' way. Everyone who stands in Jesus' way, even if it is the woman who birthed him, becomes part of the devilish plan to defeat the Son of God. At this point Mark halts the first story, the first part of the sandwich, to recount the second story.

6. So, in v22 we see scribes who have come down from Jerusalem. Now we need to realize these scribes represent an escalation in Jesus' danger. Up to now we have only seen local, Galilean Jews arguing with Jesus. But now word has got back to the capital of Jerusalem about Jesus' doings and controversies. The Jewish leaders in Jerusalem have already decided Jesus is a false prophet, and they have come to begin the struggle which will end in his death.

7. These scribes haven't come to gather facts; they've come to ruin Jesus. The verb which is used of their accusation of Jesus is the Greek Imperfect, which means they didn't just make this comment once; in the words of one commentator, this was a sustained campaign of vilification. They were working for a period of time to destroy Jesus' reputation. The core of their attack is this: Jesus is possessed by Beelzebul, and he gets his supernatural power from the prince of demons, as we see in v22.

8. Now who is Beelzebul, and where does this word come from? Basically, we can't be certain about the origin of this word. The first part, "Beel", is apparently connected with the familiar OT word "Baal", which simply means "Lord" or "Master", and which was a common title for idols and false gods. The second part, "zebul" or "zebub", might refer to such things as "house" or "dung heap" or "fly". The sense "house" might connect well to the title "prince of demons" in v22, since a house can refer to a household or even a dynasty. Then again, when Jesus retorts in v25, he talks about Satan's house being divided against itself, perhaps meaning his

household or even kingdom. All of this might indicate that Beelzebul means "Lord of the household or dynasty of demons," which of course is basically identical to "prince of demons", but we can't be certain. What we can be fairly sure of is that Beelzebul is simply another name or title for Satan, the leader of the demons; we know this because Jesus' response concerns Satan.

9. Now Jesus defends himself from this charge two ways. First, Jesus points out that Satan is too good a strategist to do what it is claimed he is doing. The scribes are saying Satan is busy casting his own demons out of demon-possessed people, through Jesus. But isn't it Satan's whole purpose to dominate as many people as he can? Isn't Satan a principality, a ruler, an evil spirit who controls this evil age and desires to extend his kingdom as far as possible? Does it follow that he would be in the business of setting people free from his own power?

10. Satan is a better strategist than that. He knows what happens if he starts fighting against himself: His kingdom, his household, will fall to the ground. So it's not possible that the supernatural power in Jesus is Satanic.

11. Jesus' second defense is this: The fact that people are being released from Satan indicates that Satan's activity and power have been curtailed. The scribes say that Jesus exorcises by the activity and power of Satan; but far from that being the case, Jesus' extensive liberation of people from Satan indicates a sort of binding of Satan, or a reduction in his activity and power.

12. Jesus uses the image of a strong man, guarding his house and possessions. That man's possessions are safe. So what if you go to that man's house and see a line of people carrying off his possessions? Wouldn't that indicate that the strong man must have been overcome and tied up by someone stronger?

13. Satan is the strong man. Demon-possessed people are his possessions. And Jesus is the Stronger Man. Widespread exorcism means Satan got knocked out and

is lying on the grass in handcuffs. So what nonsense it is to say Jesus casts out demons with Satan's help! Jesus easily dismantles the accusation of the scribes.

14. And boy do those scribes wish Jesus had left the conversation there. Most unfortunately for them, those erudite Jerusalem experts crossed a line that day. Jesus now proceeds to make a rather terrible announcement to them concerning what they've said.

15. Jesus starts by saying in v28 that every sin and blasphemy can be forgiven; whatever evil thing men do or say, if they will repent and believe, for every one of these they can receive forgiveness. But there is one exception.

16. Anyone who blasphemes the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; their sin will be upon them eternally. Now for obvious reasons this unforgiveable sin excites a lot of interest among people. We want to know how far we can go and where the line is. This is part of why there have been a number of different answers to just what this sin is.

17. But there shouldn't be any mystery about what the sin is, at least not in terms of Mark's Gospel, since Mark tells us in v30: The unforgiveable sin is accusing Jesus of having an unclean spirit; blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is calling the Spirit within Jesus Satanic. We are talking about attributing the supernatural power of Jesus to the devil. The scribes in this story did just that; and so as far as we can tell, they committed an unforgiveable sin that day. Bad move, scribes.

18. Well, Mark is finished with his second story, so it's time to finish our literary sandwich and return to the first story.

19. In v31 Jesus' mother and brothers finally arrive; this gives the impression that they have been on their way since v21. They come to Peter's house but can't get in because of the crowds, presumably, so they send a message to Jesus to come talk to them outside. The message reaches Jesus that his mother and brothers are outside looking for him.

20. Then Jesus challenges them; his real mother and brothers are not those biologically related to him, standing outside the house. Their position outside the house is emblematic of their position with Jesus; They are on the outside with Jesus, too. Jesus' real mother and brothers are those sitting around him, who do the will of God.

21. Now this idea of the false family on the outside, and the true family on the inside, will continue in the next chapter. In chapter 4 Jesus will make a difference between those on the outside, who get everything in parables, and those on the inside, who are gifted with understanding the kingdom of God. We are witnessing that distinction in our present text.

22. And what is it that makes the difference? In our text the difference is doing the will of God; those who do it are in; those who don't do it are out. And biological ties are not significant, nor is any other consideration. Either a man does God's will or he doesn't; this is the only meaningful distinction among men.

23. Now what is God's will? If we consider Mark's Gospel thus far we can say that God's will is for people to repent and believe the Gospel of the coming kingdom, centered as it is on Jesus. Repentance and faith in Jesus is God's will, the doing of which divides even families.

24. Now the story ends there without further comment; apparently Jesus' family went home dissatisfied. Again, the comparison Mark is drawing between Jesus' family and the Jerusalem scribes doesn't bode well for the family. Opposing Jesus and obstructing his mission, at whatever level, reveals dangerous disbelief. As Jesus says in another place, "Whoever is not with me is against me." At this point, despite their concern, Jesus' family is as much against him as the scribes who call him a devil.

APPLICATIONS

1. That's the text. Let's work through a few applications.

2. First, we must pray for God to give us clear insight into the Person, Word and Work of Jesus. There are many things in life which, if we get them wrong, it matters little. Your view of WWII is not too important. Your understanding of strong force and dark matter, matter little. Many things just aren't very important, and so getting them wrong is not very important. Jesus is most emphatically not one of those things. Jesus' family and the scribes get Jesus very wrong. We cannot afford to do the same. Call out to God for perception about who Jesus is, and pay close attention to Scripture. How we answer the question of Jesus' identity makes the difference between heaven and hell.

3. Second, Jesus made an opening for us to evangelize and we must do so. Prior to Jesus' coming the world was held in bondage to Satan, and the captives of his dungeon could not be released. But Jesus has now bound the strong man, and so it's time to plunder his house. We should be very encouraged to think of different ways to spread the Gospel, knowing that Jesus has opened the way for us. Satan's captives are open to rescue in a way they were not before.

4. Third, no Christian person, who loves the Lord and trusts him and seeks to do his will needs to worry about having committed the unforgiveable sin. If you had committed it, you would not love and trust the Lord, nor would you seek to obey him. So if you love and trust the Lord, don't worry. Now what if a non-Christian here thinks they may have committed this sin? I think the answer is simple: Call on Jesus now to save you, put your trust in him and leave your sins, become a Christian and you can know you have not committed it. Everyone who wants Jesus, gets Jesus.

5. Fourth and Last, Jesus can only be approached by faith and repentance. Do not trust in any other means to ingratiate you with him. Jesus' own family were required to come to Jesus just the same as everyone else did, and until they came thus, they were his opponents. Don't rely on your Christian upbringing. Don't rely on the fact your parents and grandparents are Christians. Don't rely on your

service to the church. Don't rely on giving money to the poor or the church or any past religious accomplishments. Look at Jesus and rely on him alone, as all the Savior you could ever need. Leave your sins as he commands and make it your aim to practice God's will. We must come to Jesus in just the same way everyone else always has. There is no inside track.

CONCLUSION

So today Mark showed us Jesus' family and the Jerusalem scribes aligned against Jesus, seeking to hinder his mission. Jesus responds by showing the absurdity of the scribal charge, announcing their commission of an unforgiveable sin, and challenging his family on the true basis of relationship to Jesus, which is obeying God's will to repent and believe the Gospel.