

3. An Unlikely Family

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, before we come to God's word, let's pray together. Let's bow our heads. Our Father in heaven, we thank you so much that through the Lord Jesus, you welcome us and love to hear our prayer.
- We thank you, Lord, for the certain coming of your kingdom, where death is dead and the curse of sin is done away with. But Father, we wait for that day with all the hardship and uncertainty of life here in a fallen world.
- With worries about our work, our health, our families and our loved ones. And also with our constant record of sin and stumbling and our dishonor of your name.
- Lord, thank you that despite all these things, we can have confidence in your fatherly care through the Lord Jesus. And our prayer, Lord, is that as we come to you now, you would quieten our hearts and help us to hear your voice.
- We pray, Lord, for your spirit's work in pointing us to your son and giving us humble and obedient hearts. For we ask it all in Jesus' name. Amen.
- [1 : 2 3] Well, turn with me, friends, back to page 838 in the Visitor's Bibles, Mark chapter 3. And we'll be looking today at the last few paragraphs, verses 21 to 35 of that chapter.
- Last week we saw both mounting interest in Jesus and mounting opposition. Jesus withdrew from the synagogue and as the passage last week ended, he withdrew as well from the crowds and began to found his new kingdom through his apostles.
- And we'll carry on from verse 20 today. Then he went home and the crowd gathered again so that they could not even eat.
- And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying he's out of his mind. And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying he's possessed by Beelzebul and by the prince of demons.
- He casts out demons. And he called them to him and said to them in parables, how can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand.
- [2 : 4 6] And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand but is coming to an end.
- But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed, he may plunder his house.
- Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man and whatever blasphemies they utter. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin.
- For they had said he has an unclean spirit. And his mother and his brothers came and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. And a crowd was sitting around him and they said to him, your mother and brothers are outside seeking you.
- And he answered them, who are my mother and my brothers? And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, here are my mother and my brothers.

[4 : 00] Whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother. Blood is thicker than water.

You can choose your friends, but you can't choose your family. Two phrases we often hear used and we instinctively believe. But two phrases which Jesus seems to flatly contradict in today's passage.

Now, there's an awful lot going on in these last 15 verses. A heated discussion about Satan. A difficult section about one unforgivable sin.

In short, there are so many eye-catching words in this passage. That it's easy to miss the main points that Mark is making. But when you take a step back, you can see that really this is a section all about family.

Or more specifically, it's about which family we belong to. Blood is thicker than water. Well, yes, but there's something which counts more than both of them.

[5 : 14] You can't choose your family. Well, no, but Jesus can. And over these verses, he outlines precisely what it is which will mark us out as a member of his.

Now, you might have noticed as we've gone along how this third chapter of Mark has been setting a pattern that Christ's kingdom is following to this day. It's been showing us, if you like, the shape of things to come for God's church.

We began with verse 6 and an unholy alliance of dead religion and establishment. Joining together to plot against the gospel.

And then last week, we saw Jesus as an unrecognized king. Founding his new kingdom amid a mixed reaction of acceptance, rejection, and even outright satanic hostility.

And so finally, this week, we get a little more detail about that unlikely family who will make up God's new kingdom.

[6 : 25] About precisely who will and who won't belong to Christ's new church. Which is why, just as last week, Mark began and ended the passage with the great crowd pressing in on Jesus.

This week, he sandwiches the whole tricky section with mention of Jesus' relatives, his family. At the beginning of the passage, verse 21, they hear all the fuss his gospel is causing and begin to worry that he's going out of his mind.

They decide to come and get him, to take him home and keep him quiet. And we don't meet them again until right at the end, verse 31, where Mark shows us their arrival and the unexpected response they hear from the Lord.

And each of the tricky little sections in between has something to say to us about the true family of Jesus. As well as a warning to those who might presume that they have a natural claim upon his kingdom.

So as we look at what comes in between the family, first describes accusation in verse 22 that Jesus is in some way possessed by Satan. Or at Jesus' parable about the binding of the strong man.

[7 : 50] Or at the following section about blasphemy against the spirit. The question we want to ask ourselves is, what does this have to say about the family of Christ's kingdom?

So who are they then? Who are the true family of Jesus? It's important we know that, isn't it? If we want to be sure we truly belong to him. If we want to sing to our Father God as we just did.

Well firstly, they're not the ones you might expect. Jesus spends more time dealing with those who might think they belong to Christ's kingdom.

So firstly, false family are those who blaspheme the spirit by rejecting the son. Now the shocking thing is that false family seems to include not just the religious leaders, but Jesus' natural flesh and blood.

Mark seems to be lumping all together who reject Jesus and his message. So just as we saw with the great crowd last week, you can get very close to Jesus.

[9 : 02] Even grow up all your life in the household of faith without ever truly knowing him. And just as a privileged family background doesn't automatically qualify you for his kingdom.

Neither does pious religious behavior or theological knowledge. So after a quick trailer of Jesus' relatives in verse 21, most of Mark's attention is on these pious scribes.

This special theological commission that's been sent down from Jerusalem. Now this group of scribes, it seems, has been investigating Jesus right since chapter 2.

When he forgave a paralyzed man. And they've been looking for some sort of explanation for his teaching and his miracles. And now at last, we're about to hear their verdict.

That Jesus' work is in fact the work of the devil. And so Jesus first demolishes their argument. And then in the next paragraph, delivers a chilling warning.

[10 : 11] Now it has to be said that their argument in verse 22 is not an impressive one. I don't know how long it took this committee of scribes to meet and hold consultations and pour over their theology books.

But for all their consideration, the conclusion they come to is not very convincing, is it? They've seen people transformed. They've seen a man's crippled hand restored.

And many in the great crowd last week healed and delivered from the torment of demon possession. But as we saw with the Pharisees, back in verse 5, their stubborn hearts are absolutely closed to the plain evidence of their eyes.

And perhaps they've been deceived by the unclean spirits of verse 11 last week. Crying out Jesus' identity as if they were somehow playing on the same team. But verse 22 is apparently the best explanation they can come up with for all they've witnessed.

That all of Jesus' wonderfully gracious work of overthrowing the grip of darkness on people's lives is some elaborate conspiracy with the devil.

[11 : 34] By the prince of demons, he casts out demons. Wise and learned men can sometimes be very foolish, can't they?

And perhaps despite all of their consultation, they aren't too certain about their findings themselves. Notice that they don't seem to confront Jesus himself with the accusation.

It seems in verse 22 like they're simply saying it behind his back. But Jesus is no shrinking violet. In verse 23, he calls them straight to him.

Did you notice that? And right out in the open, he shows them just how childish their thinking is. And his argument basically goes like this. What you're claiming would mean that Satan had scored a tremendous own goal.

What I've been doing is rescuing men and women from under his power. So if I'm in league with the enemy, then he's launching a full frontal attack on himself.

[12 : 41] It's ridiculous, isn't it? It's like a boxer trying to win a fight by chopping off his own hands. Well, Jesus develops his answer more. And we'll come back to that when we think about what he has to say to the true family of Christ.

But first, just notice how their pathetic denial of Jesus' work explains the chilling warning he gives them in verse 28.

You see, these are the experts in the Bible. These are the ones who should have seen the rescue of men and women and the triumph of God's king over sickness and disease.

And immediately fallen at his feet in joy. Here at last was the arrival of the one whom their whole purpose as teachers of Israel was to prepare the way for.

And instead, when he arrives, they stubbornly and obstinately refuse to acknowledge him. They attribute his work not to God's spirit, but to Satan.

[13 : 52] He threatens their pride and their position. And in return, they blindly reject the obvious. Do you see the irony there?

That all through this chapter, it's the character of the opposition to Jesus that in fact has had something rather demonic about it. Back in verse 11, it was out in the open, demon possession.

But surely the thinking of these scribes or the hard-hearted hatred of the religious leaders back in the synagogue was just as sinister.

Far from Jesus being the problem. It's the dead religious types who Satan has under his spell. All of them, from the demons in verse 11 to the scribes here in verse 22, see Jesus not as a deliverer, but as a destroyer.

So if you've worried in the past about this idea of blasphemy against the spirit, if you struggle to understand it, I think Mark's little explanation in verse 30 is a great help.

[15 : 04] Jesus said these things, for they were saying he has an unclean spirit. In other words, Mark makes it very clear that the scribes' problem is their attitude to Jesus himself.

False family are those who blaspheme the spirit by rejecting the son who he points to. If you will not have God's king and will not accept the salvation he offers you, then there's no way back, is there?

Now let me say that you're meant to find these verses disturbing. If they make you a little uncomfortable, that may be no bad thing. What's at stake here is far too great for Jesus to mince his words.

But equally, don't misunderstand who he intends to challenge. If you love the Lord, but worry constantly about whether you might have committed the unforgivable sin, then you're precisely not the sort of person who Jesus has in his sights.

Blaspheming the spirit is not swearing with our mouths. It's swearing with our hearts to have nothing to do with Jesus of Nazareth.

[16 : 26] It's to look at his amazing work in the world and see nothing but a challenge to your little kingdom. And when you begin to look on the rescuer as the enemy, then you close yourself into a burning building.

I wonder if you've ever had that horrible experience where a little bird, a robin or something, becomes trapped inside a room and it's frantically flapping around looking for an escape.

But the more you try to help it and give it its freedom, the more desperate and frantic it becomes. It's awful, isn't it, when that happens?

Because you know the only hope it has of getting out alive is the very thing, the very person it sees as a threat. And if only it would settle down and take a breath and let you help it, everything would be fine.

But it doesn't happen, does it? Well, the tragic truth is that so many human lives are spent in just the same way.

[17 : 43] And I'm sure it's not how we would describe it ourselves. We're usually far too proud to see it like that, aren't we? But perhaps the reality is that even some of us here see the Lord as a problem rather than a rescuer.

Sometimes you can see it before your eyes, a person closing the door. I had that terrifying experience just last week. An exceptionally bright young man who, like the scribes here, loves to investigate the Bible and talk theology and who always seems so close to the truth.

But there's always another objection when it comes to Jesus. We see the very one offering us freedom as a threat to our independence or lifestyle or identity.

And if we would just stop fluttering and take a breath and look at all he's done, we might have a chance. But instead, all too often, we sneer and panic and close the door.

Well, you can probably imagine the awkward silence after Jesus uttered those words. The angry scribes shuffling their feet. Perhaps it was a relief when someone passed through the crowds to get a message through in verse 32 that Jesus' family had come to get him.

[19 : 20] But he hasn't quite finished, has he? He wants to make himself absolutely clear that even they have no automatic claim on his kingdom.

And if, just like the scribes, they write off the message of God's Son, then they too will stay outside. So secondly, let's look at what Christ has to say to his true family.

Who is it that really belongs to his new kingdom? Well, true family are those who do God's will by listening to the Son.

You see, Jesus' kingdom will be wonderfully inclusive. You don't get in by some special connection to him, or by knowing the right people, or even by your standing in church.

Instead, Jesus addresses his invitation, not to the learned scribes, or to his waiting relatives, but to the whole crowd. Now, last week, the crowd was a slightly ambiguous thing, wasn't it?

[20 : 28] It was greatly interested in Jesus, but also causing a lot of problems. But look now at verses 32, 33. And two times, Mark tells us that they were sitting around Jesus.

In other words, they're listening eagerly to what he has to say. What a contrast between the crowds sitting at Jesus' feet and the family standing outside, or the sneering scribes.

And so when the relatives arrived to quieten Jesus down, they get a rather surprising reply. Verse 33. He answered them, Who are my mother and my brothers?

And looking at those who sat around him, he said, Here are my mother and my brothers. Whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.

So who are the unlikely family of Christ's new kingdom? Well, they are any at all who do God's will by listening to the Son.

[21 : 37] Last week, we saw Christ's extraordinary grace in founding his new kingdom, his church, upon 12 unlikely apostles.

And now he will build on those foundations by welcoming any at all who will enter by humble obedience to the King.

Now just notice how the whole section that we read today makes that same wonderful point to the true family of Christ. Because at the very same time as he dealt so fiercely with the scribes, Jesus was also giving wonderful assurance to his true family.

Do you see that? Look again at verse 26 and the rest of Jesus' answer to the scribes. If Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand.

He's coming to an end. So in fact, says Jesus, rather than condemning me, the works you've seen me do are a spectacular sign that I've come to bring the kingdom of darkness to an end.

[22 : 46] They show that his grip on my people and the tyranny of Satan's rule is over. Verse 27, no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods unless he first binds the strong man.

Then indeed he may plunder his house. So here he is. I, Jesus, am the stronger man, the one come to bind the enemy and rob him of his prisoners.

And the triumph of my kingdom means an end to the cruel reign of sin and death.

So for all those who will look at Jesus' work and with the Spirit's help will accept what he is doing, there will be a full and free pardon.

Of course, the scribes wouldn't hear it, would they? But don't miss the wonderful promise of verse 28. Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of men and whatever blasphemies they utter.

[23 : 57] It's easy to let the warning to the scribes grab so much of our attention that we miss the wonderful comfort of that sentence, isn't it? The wonderful comfort to Jesus' true family.

But we don't have to refuse the rescuer. So do you see how it's that context of Jesus' stern words to the false family that helps us understand his words to the true brothers and sisters of Christ?

If instead of their proud rejection, we come to him with humble repentance, then his promise is full, free forgiveness.

And more than that, it's a wonderful welcome to the family. For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.

So do you see doing the will of God doesn't mean achieving some impressive feats of righteousness, does it? It's simply to do what the scribes would not.

[25 : 07] Humble, repentant obedience to the king, listening to him. It's just what Mark goes on to explain on the very next page in the parable of the sower.

Those who are sown in good soil, Jesus' true family are those who hear his word and accept it and bear fruit for his kingdom.

So doing the will of God is simply another way to say real, humble, saving faith in the Lord Jesus. Now if you're a Christian who has sat in church for so many years that this all seems a little stale and familiar, let me just invite you to take a moment to reflect on what a truly remarkable thing that is.

Remember the tension that's been running through this chapter. People right up close to God, the pressing crowds, the religious types, Jesus' own flesh and blood, who in truth were miles away from him.

And yet, however far away you began, however dark the clouds and however desperate your situation looked, you can end up a brother or sister of Christ.

[26 : 30] Blood is thicker than water? Well, an obedient heart counts more than either, doesn't it? you can walk right off the street into a building like this as an enemy of God and walk out half an hour later having met the Lord Jesus as a beloved son.

At the end of the day, all that matters is whether, like some of these crowds, you end up sitting at Jesus' feet listening to him. So there's Mark's preview of the world we live in today, a world marked by an unholy alliance of hatred towards God's grace, a world that rejects and refuses to recognize his king, but a world in which an unlikely family of faith is growing day by day by day.

A family of people just like you and me who didn't earn our place and weren't born into it, but who were welcomed nonetheless because of the love of its king.

A family made up of any at all who will do God's will by listening to his son. Let's pray. Father God, we thank you so much for the wonderful welcome you offer to all of us who belong to your son.

We thank you that you don't simply forgive us and wipe clean the slate, but that far more you welcome us as a son and daughter, as people called by your own name.

[28 : 23] And so, Father, we ask that you would help us to live by the words we sang earlier, your name we bear through Christ our Saviour. We to Jesus bow the knee that your name may hallowed be.

For we ask it, Lord, for your great glory. Amen. And now here are our sechs foring can resolve