

Mark 3

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[0 : 00] Mark, had he turned in chapter 3 to my English high school teacher. Mark, what are you doing?

Let's hope this is only the first draft. Within 35 lines, you've taken the reader from a synagogue and out to a sea and climbing a mountain and then off to a home and introduced others who have stumbled into this family scene, making their way down from Jerusalem, and then back to the family.

I mean, at least Mark, verses 22 to 30 should be elsewhere in the sequence. It breaks the rhythm, whatever rhythm there is.

Go back to your study, Mark. Give me another draft, something that makes sense. That's probably what my English teacher would have done.

At least that's what my English teacher did to everything I ever wrote. But you've entered into afternoon service in the midst of a people who believe that what's written here has this mysterious authorship not only of the writer, but the very spirit of the living God in that these vignettes which seem utterly disjointed are under divine orchestration, perfectly put together.

[1 : 40] So what are we to do with it today? In other words, how might this Word sit upon us rather than us upon the Word?

Well, the text is Mark 3. The talk is the third in a sequence of ten that cover the gist of this particular gospel.

Under the heading of two questions, who was Jesus and does He still matter? If you're only joining us today, then you've come, well, a third of the way in.

And we learned two weeks ago in chapter 1 that whatever we think about Jesus might be one thing, but Mark tends to think He is a very big deal.

He came highly recommended. And then in chapter 2 last week, Pastor Jay let us in on why Mark thinks he is such a big deal.

[2 : 45] The healing of the paralytic. He's big because he claims to be able to forgive sins. I don't know when the last time it is that you might have met somebody with that type of claim, but it's a big claim.

That here is a man who, and for whom the heavens have opened, and the voice of God indicates that He has sent him so that you and I might restore this relationship with Him.

So by the time you get to chapter 3, you're really then beginning to wonder, what are people making of this? Let me put chapter 3 together under the guise of an election night.

I guess we're going to have one fairly soon in our country. I love election nights. There's that early moment before the polls seem to even close where the reporter is on the sidewalk in Chicago, not necessarily 15 feet from the door, asking people who they voted for and why.

They're exit polling. You're beginning to get the earliest of indications about what are people thinking tonight? And then the polls in your area close, and the news, at least on the television, moves from this kind of anecdotal exit polling to what they call early returns, where there's just a minuscule percentage of the vote that's been tallied.

[4 : 37] And if you live, unfortunately, in places like California, where the polls would still be open, and you're already learning what people are thinking. Well, you're in chapter 3.

Mark has decided it's already time to give you some anecdotal exit polling, or at the most, some early returns.

Who was Jesus? According to Mark, the Christ, the promised Son of God. Why does He matter? He claims to be able to make things right between you and God.

What do people think? Well, 3.1-6. The key verse, of course, is verse 6.

The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against Him. How to destroy Him. It's the first of His anecdotal interviews.

[5 : 37] What are people making of Jesus? Well, word on the street, there are those who are standing against Him.

Namely, the Pharisees and the Herodians. The Pharisees, of course, have been busy since we were together last Sunday.

Last Sunday, the scribes were at the center of a controversy with Jesus over the healing of the paralytic. But between last Sunday and today, you see that this is already the fourth confrontation He's had with them.

I mean, just take a look back. Verses 15-17 of chapter 2, it was the Pharisees who saw Jesus eating with sinners and saying, why does He eat with tax collectors and sinners?

Let's say that might have been Tuesday or so. But by Wednesday or Thursday, we have another vignette, chapter 2, verses 18 and following, where they're asking another set of questions.

[6 : 47] Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast? Another confrontation. Questions about who He is and what He is like.

The third one, let's say it was sometime even within the last 40 hours, one Sabbath He was going through, beginning at verse 23, the grain fields, verse 24, and the Pharisees were saying to Him, look, why are they doing what's not lawful on the Sabbath?

And then, today, our own text, He enters a synagogue, and it's the Pharisees, verse 6, who are hardened in heart. Anecdotal evidence?

The Pharisees, or let me put it this way, the religious conservatives are against Him. It's a strange thing to think of religious conservatives being against Jesus, at least in our own day, but at any rate, this is certainly the case.

They are flat out against Him. Why? Because He has no regard for their ways, or their rules, or the people with whom He runs.

[8 : 09] Therefore, with His lack of regard, He is dangerous to the status quo of what represents good, healthy living in a moral, constructive way.

They stand against Him. Interestingly, Mark pairs them with these groups, he calls in verse 6, the Herodians.

Well, who are the Herodians? They'll appear in chapter 8, and later again, I think, in chapter 12, but we're not quite sure if the Herodians are a subset of the scribes. There's a moment where they're actually linked with the Pharisees and the scribes, but at any rate, the Word itself gives some indication, even to a 6th grade reader, that they were pro-Herod.

I'd go further. They're kind of pro-Rome. They're not necessarily the religious conservatives who are unhappy with Jesus for upsetting the way in which we live in relationship to God.

They're strictly the political conservatives who want things to remain as they are. Strange bedfellows.

[9 : 22] I think Mark really intends that irony in verse 6. Here you have the Pharisees who were kind of anti-Herod, anti-Rome, wanted a very religiously oriented world, are in league with the secular Herodians who also want the status quo.

The Pharisees and the Herodians standing against Him because of His disregard for their rules, their ways, and the ones with whom He runs.

And that disregard led to the point where they thought it had risen to the level of being dangerous. He was having so many people around Him that a way of life was in danger of, in a revolutionary way, unwinding and all the stability of life with it.

And so that disregard which led to danger says in verse 6, they went out to figure out how to destroy Him. Wow, what an interview with the reporter on the street to meet one of those folks after the vote was cast.

But then we have another group, verses 7 through 10. It's not the religious and political conservatives.

[10 : 44] Who is it? It's the crowds. Look at the phrase there, verse 7. A great crowd. Again, in verse 8.

The great crowd. And then in verse 9, He told the disciples to have a boat ready because of the crowd. And if the Pharisees and the Herodians were standing against Him, what does Mark want you to know about the early returns on Jesus in regard to the crowds?

Well, there it is. It's right there in verse 10. They pressed around Him. And so it is today. There are people standing against Him for reasons where they think He would prove unstable for a way of life. And there are those who are more than willing to crowd around Him. But if you have read the Bible at all, and if you haven't, I'll let you in on it, the crowds always were around Him for what they could get from Him.

It's the same way today, isn't it? I mean, we'd pack the place out if I could give you 13 things that God will do for you if you pay attention to Jesus.

[12:01] I just watched the television. The crowds are forever running and pressing around a religious Jesus who will offer you all you want in this world.

So they're pressing around Him. And then look, there's a third category, verse 11 and 12. I think one of the most interesting groups on this exit polling or these early returns among the whole chapter.

Whenever the unclean spirits saw Him, they fell down before Him and cried out, You are the Son of God! And He strictly ordered them not to make Him known. Some are standing against Him.

Others are pressing around Him. The unclean spirits are falling down before Him. What an irony. I mean, you don't think of unclean spirits, do you?

Falling down before Jesus. It's actually the one kind of proper response in the whole chapter, but it doesn't quite sit right.

[13:07] Because all the way back to chapter 1, we saw again an unclean spirit in verse 23 and following. And He cried out, What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?

1.24 Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are. The Holy One of God. In other words, the demons falling before Him might be recognizing that they live in subjection to Him, but they are not willingly, nor graciously, nor with any attention, adoring Him.

Which is what He wants from you and me, and so seldom receives. But there they are. Some standing against Him, others pressing around Him, the demons themselves falling down before Him.

And look, He strictly ordered them not to make Him known. We'll come back to this, I'm sure, over the next seven weeks. It's something called the Messianic secret. I mean, why does Jesus tell these demons not to let the word out about who He is?

And there's historically, of course, been all kinds of answers, like perhaps Jesus is merely worried about His own physical protection in case news did get out.

[14:25] He was in danger of His life, and yet also the crowds would have made Him king. So maybe there was something about just the nature of the press of it all. He needed to be physically protected.

There's others who think maybe it's a psychological ploy, like He really wanted to get the word out. You know, reverse psychology. Don't tell anybody what I'm about to tell you about Pastor Jay and what he did yesterday.

And of course, that would run through the church in a minute, wouldn't it? So what did you do yesterday? You know, physically protected, a psychological ploy to really get the word out?

It doesn't seem to hold much water. It's a rather deceptive way to work. You don't see Jesus doing that anywhere else. Some think it might just be a literary convention. You know, like He's not allowing the reader to go away.

You know, you've got to have to keep reading. I don't think any of those hold entirely. I think there's some theological, interpretive force for it. It would take me a while to explain it to you, and therefore we're not going to get into it much today and we will over the coming weeks.

[15:32] But there's something in Mark's Gospel that you don't really know who He is and why He matters until after He dies and rises again. In other words, it's that thing later in the Gospel that actually interprets all of this earlier stuff.

There's no way you could have known who He was. and He wanted to let that event be the interpretive weight of His identity and His mission.

But nevertheless, there are the demons falling down before Him. 13 through 20, you get a whole other group. It's the most fascinating little insertion.

But I think even if my English teacher were here today, she would begin to think, well, maybe there is order in Mark's work after all. But there is a group that He called and they came to Him.

So remember, you have the religious and political conservatives against Him, the crowds around Him, the demonically crazed falling before Him, and then these 12 who are called to come to Him. [16:48] and look at that reason, so that they might be with Him. In other words, while everyone's reacting and you're getting the early sense that Jesus is playing to mixed reviews, He's not universally acclaimed in any of the headlines the day after of His ministry.

And while He doesn't play to universally acclaimed reviews, He is nevertheless calling people to be with Him. We'll come back to that at the end, whether or not He might be calling you to be with Him. But then verse 20 and following verses 21, you get His family, or what I would just term those who are closest to Him. Look at their response.

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! I love that. Literally, it's from the verb here to stand. And He's standing outside Himself. It's what you and I say sometimes when you see somebody who's just completely lost and you say, well, He's beside Himself.

[18:13] Or, He's out of it. That's literally what they're saying, that He is standing outside of Himself. He's gone over the top.

He's not even eating. He needs a break. He needs vacation. I don't care if it's the first week of school. He's already looking for vacation. In other words, those who were closest to Him thought, you've taken this God thing a little too far.

Time for a sabbatical. Get away where you can write. Or at least rest. Well, there they are. They're the closest to Him.

And look at the summary of them in verse 31 where they pick back up. His mother and brothers came standing outside. That's at least the homiletical, conventional phrase that I would bring to you. That those who are closest to Him are saying that He is standing outside of Himself and yet they are the ones standing outside of Him. Isn't that interesting? So what are the early returns on who is Jesus and does He still matter?

[19:35] Just like in our day, so it was in His day. There are those who are standing against Him. There are those who for the wrong reasons will always be wanting to get something from Him.

There are those who spiritually recognize Him but will not submit to Him. There are others who are being called that they might be with Him. And yet there are some who say He is standing outside of Himself who in the end, ironically, they stand outside of Him.

And then you've got that big group. If you have a red letter Bible, you get all the red letters here. You get the big section that's reserved for Jesus' teaching and therefore we ought to spend some time here.

Verses 22 through 30, you have what I would call the cultured clergy and they are coming down with judgment upon Him.

It says the scribes came down from Jerusalem. I haven't been to Jerusalem. I haven't been there in regard to where Jesus was actually staying at this time in His ministry.

[20:49] But from what I read, it was a literal descent of hundreds and hundreds of feet. The cultured elite, those who held the weight amongst the clergy, have now come down with judgment upon Him.

That's the response on the early exit polls. You've seen all the groups there. What a coherent chapter. Beautifully put together.

Well, let's take a look at these who have come down from Jerusalem. What is the charge they make against Him?

How does He respond to them? And what is meant by this unforgivable sin with which He leaves them? Well, look at the charge.

Verse 22. He's possessed by Beelzebul and by the prince of demons he casts out demons. At a wooden level, you could almost say that their judgment upon Him was twofold.

[21:54] One in regard to His person and the other in regard to His work. In regard to His person, He's possessed. And look how the writer bundles all the terms for the things you don't want to be possessed by.

Beelzebul. Prince of demons. Demons. Even Satan. I mean, just grouping them all and throwing them forward. In other words, He's really in a bad way.

He's been overrun by evil. In fact, all of His work is done by the prince of demons.

That's the second accusation. By the prince of demons He casts out demons. Wow. What a charge against one who has only done well for people.

How does Jesus respond? Verse 23 and following, He called to them and said to them in parables. And here you see the first nature of His response.

[23 : 09] He's going to show the stupidity of the charge. and then afterwards He's going to subtly reveal to them His real calling.

And then finally He's going to severely warn them of an eternal condemnation. That's the way He responds. So take a look at it. This stupidity of their charge.

He says, How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself that kingdom cannot stand. 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. Don't you love that? His family comes and says He's standing outside Himself.

Jesus launches on this term and He says a house divided against itself cannot stand. In other words your accusation that I am somehow casting out people who have been held in bondage by demons by the power of the devil is absurd.

[24 : 16] It's stupid. A third grader could see that your charge holds no water. And he's right. But then look at the subtlety when He reveals His true calling.

Verse 27 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.

Now you're going to see in a moment the rich history of this response. But subtly He is certainly saying you may not accept me but I am a strong man and I am binding the work of the one you call strong.

so that I may plunder his house. That's what Jesus has come to do according to Mark. He's come as a strong man to thief his way into another strong man's hold and lyre bind him so that people who have been held captive to him are free from him.

That's his calling. Now you need to know that Mark will claim that it's a universal calling that every one of us is prisoner to our own desires to our own idols.

[25 : 54] well you know as well as I do you don't have power over the things that have power over you do you? Want to get up tomorrow morning and turn over a new leaf and live a right way?

Will you? Do you not have the life experience that we all share that indicates we don't have the power to beat the things that have power over you?

Unless someone were to come and be stronger than all of that it's certainly not within you. Well that's what Jesus does for you.

And look at that warning verse 28 and 9 truly I say to you all sins will be forgiven the children of man and whatever blasphemies they utter but whoever blasphemies against the Holy Spirit never as forgiveness but as guilty of an eternal sin.

Well it's the latter half of that line that gets most of the attention but don't you love first of all the former half all sins will be forgiven the children of man and whatever blasphemies they utter wow that's how big Jesus is for the world all sins whatever blasphemies they utter are capable of being forgiven what claim save one the sin against the Holy Spirit which is where people who are spiritually sensitive and perhaps you might be one who's grown up in church your whole life and you've been living in this kind of fear of this kind of thing like oh my gosh what if I was to do the sin against the Holy Spirit it would never be forgiven and indeed people with sensitive consciences this verse has been very troubling and so it's very important that we understand what it means and what it doesn't mean

[27 : 55] I like commentator Joel Marcus when he says what it means is total malignant opposition to Jesus that twists the evidence of his life-giving power to evidence that he is demon possessed I like that it is this total malignant opposition to Jesus that actually says his work is not from the spirit of the living God to free people but belongs to the devil himself if that's what you believe about Jesus that is a sin of which there is no position to recover but it doesn't mean that you didn't at one point think that but you die in that state you continue to attribute to Jesus the activity of Satan when it was really the finger of God how does one recover from that when you actually stand in the presence of

God and he is the only one who is to be a mediator between you and God that's what it means to reject the word and work of Christ saying that God is not in it think your way clear on that I want to

tell you what else I think it is the sin against the Holy Spirit I want to look at it another way why does he do it in this way at this time this this fascinating I won't be able to I wish I could give it to you in a mature way but I am convinced that that Jesus here is impaling the scribes upon their own authority as much as he is upon their rejection of him as a person now the scribes of course had a model the model scribe would have been

Ezra Ezra was a wonderful man he gave himself he was a writer he gave himself to copying the law to interpreting the law and to explaining what it was to be in relationship to God under the law that's what a scribe did they were the custodians of Torah what an elevated job these were the biblical studies majors what does he say to them I think he borrows completely from Isaiah I think he in all of the language here he is relaying terms and ideas and thoughts that should be immediately rising to their mind according to the authority that they hold and that they copy and that they interpret namely Isaiah listen to Isaiah 49 24 and 25 can the prey be taken from the mighty or the captives of a tyrant be rescued for thus says the

Lord even the captives of the mighty shall be taken and the prey of the tyrant rescued for I will contend with those who contend with you and I will save your children that's the promise of Isaiah to take captive from the mighty one who children family Isaiah 42 22 but this is a people plundered and looted go look in the LXX the the language of this chapter and what you find in Isaiah is unbelievably unmistakably clear the parallel Mark Mark is wanting you to go read Isaiah when you're done particularly chapters 40 to 49 42 22 but this is a people plundered and looted they are all of them trapped in holes and hidden in prisons you ever feel that way yourself trapped in the hole of your own sin held captive by that which you do not have the power to overcome they have become what plunder with none to rescue spoil!

your mind comes back to that Sabbath day in chapter 3 where he says to the man with the withered hand stretch out your hand and immediately his hand was restored Isaiah 44 13 I have stirred him and he shall set my exiles free Isaiah 49 9 he shall say to the prisoners come out and your mind is carried back to chapter 1 where Jesus rebuked him saying be silent and come out of him how how does this happen through one who is mightier than the mighty man in other words we need a really mighty man a mightier man a mighty mouse a mighty man a mightier man and what did

[33 : 28] John the Baptist declare when he came on the scene one who is coming who is mightier than I am who will baptize you with the spirit Jesus according to Mark is this man Isaiah 40 verse 10 behold the Lord God comes with might Isaiah 49 verse 26 I am the Lord your Savior and your Redeemer the mighty one of Jacob chapter 48 verse 16 and now the Lord God has sent me and his spirit Isaiah 44 3 I will pour out my spirit upon your offspring the whole promises of the isianic text of the servant songs are listed in the context of the forgiveness of sins that's where Isaiah 40 starts where you're going to be comforted because it's time for your sins to be forgiven a mighty one will come with his spirit upon him who will grab hold of the one who has power to hold you captive and will release you and this is to say nothing of what the context says about the role of family in

Isaiah 40 to 49 or of recreating people or raising up brothers and sisters and mothers and fathers indeed kings will become your fathers Isaiah is filled with it there's a promise that I'm going to make a new family no wonder mark inserts this scene in the brackets of his family and what does Jesus then really mean when he talks to these folks what's the sin against the Holy Spirit let me put it this way don't reject the word and work of Jesus as being that which is the word and work of God and secondly don't you dare reject the prophetic discourse as the very word of God in other words he impales the scribes on their text but they should have known all of this and when they stand before the judgment seat of

God I don't think Jesus is going to say well you remember that day early returns you know we put reporters on the street you didn't like what I said you rejected me you know what I think he's going to say go your way for you rejected Isaiah and he was your authority and you indicated you would not have him the whole corpus of the Bible is the living word of God don't reject it don't sit in judgment on it find a way in Christ to live under it well we get to the end as we should because dinner is waiting and he says who are my mother and my brothers who's my family who's my real family who's my friend and looking around at those who sat around him he said here are my mother and my brothers whoever does the will of

God he is my mother and sister or brother and sister and mother to do the will of God is simply two things according to John it's to receive or believe you can look this up yourself later John 6 38 to 40 to do the will of God is to believe that Jesus is the one God sent so believe in Jesus secondly follow

in his ways Jesus says he who hears my words and does them is the one who does the will of the father so grab hold of Jesus and begin to live under his ways and you are born into his family I was thinking of John R.W.

Stott he's in his 80s now he's in a nursing home he's in a wheelchair he can barely get up and around doesn't preach anymore he was a great preacher of the 20th century perhaps the greatest in the English language he was 19 years old he'd gone off to university just as many here are in the midst of now!

[38 : 53] until until you are older and more experienced don't worry his father says to him all will be well in the end do all you can to widen your outlook and attain wisdom hey where do you stand with Jesus against him you want to just press around him see what you can get from him you want to fall before him with no adoration in your heart you want to say that he stands outside of himself the real indication that you are standing outside of him you want to come down with judgment upon him or do you want to be gathered to him that you might be with him seven talks to go a lot more to learn thus far

God's word our heavenly father there are many here who are wondering whether we say yes to Jesus or whether now is not the time I pray that by the power of your spirit you would help all of us here to receive him and his word and his work and begin eagerly following after him no matter what our age or place in life to the glory of God Amen