

Who's in?

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[0 : 00] The reading this morning is taken from Mark chapter 3, beginning at verse 7, which is on page 1010 of the Church Bibles. Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the sea, and a great crowd followed from Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem and Idumea and from beyond the Jordan and from around Tyre and Sidon.

When the great crowd heard all that he was doing, they came to him, and he told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, lest they crush him.

For he had healed many, so that all who had diseases pressed around him to touch him. And 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.

And he went up on the mountain and called to him those who he desired, and they came to him.

And he appointed twelve whom he also named apostles, so that they might be with him, and he might send them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons.

He appointed the twelve. Simon, to whom he gave the name Peter. James, the son of Zebedee, and John, the brother of James, to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder.

[1 : 32] Andrew and Philip and Bartholomew and Matthew and Thomas, and James, the son of Alphaeus and Thaddeus, and Simon the Canaanian, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

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 is out of his mind.

And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, He is possessed by Beelzebul, and by the prince of demons he casts out the demons. And he called them to him, and said to them in parables, 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.

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.

[2 : 49] 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 were saying, 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 your 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. For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.

Thanks, Emily. You want to keep that passage open, we're going to be looking at that. Shall we pray?

[4 : 00] Heavenly Father, as we come to your word, we pray that you would open our hearts to your word, and that you would open your word to our hearts.

And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. How does the kingdom of God advance? How does it gain territory?

Well, that's the question we're going to be thinking about over the next four weeks. The subject of these next four weeks is the advance of the kingdom of God in this age.

If you're visiting with us, or you're looking into Christianity, it's so good to have you with us. There are few things more important than understanding the work of God and of Christ in this age.

And actually, that's the same for all of us. The kingdom of God does not advance as we might expect. It does not advance like the kingdoms of this world, with tanks and drones or through economic growth.

[5 : 25] But the kingdom of God is advancing as a quiet revolution. That's what we're going to see in these two chapters of Mark's gospel.

The verse that prompts this whole section, and we're diving in again to Mark. We've been working our way through.

That's our practice at Grace Church. And we've got to 3 verse 7. But where we left off, just look at 3 verse 6. That is the context verse for our section.

3 verse 6. The Pharisees, the religious leaders of the day, went out immediately and held council with the Herodians against him how to destroy him.

The religious establishment of the day began plotting very early on to kill Jesus. I don't know if you knew that. That's what Mark shows us.

[6 : 23] And it is this opposition that precipitates the whole of chapters 3 and 4. Because it raises these questions. What impact will opposition have on Jesus and his kingdom?

Who will be in his kingdom? And how will it advance? Do you see how this opposition raises those questions? And it is those questions that Mark, who is recording Jesus' life and teaching us, is going to address in chapters 3 and 4.

The advance of the kingdom of God. And we begin to see here that human opposition will have absolutely no impact whatsoever on the advance of Jesus' kingdom.

It will be like firing a water pistol at a tank trying to stop it. Or trying to stop an avalanche with a feather.

Jesus won't be stopped. And neither will the advance of his kingdom in this age before his return. Three principles from chapter 3.

[7 : 38] Three fundamental principles. And you'll see on your sheets if that helps. Number one. Regardless of opposition, the kingdom of God, of Jesus, will advance through his apostles' word.

Number two. The kingdom will advance because the son has bound Satan. Number three. The kingdom will advance. The kingdom will be filled with God's new people.

That's where we're going. Number one. The kingdom will advance through his apostles' word.

Come with me. Look down at chapter 3, verse 13. Jesus goes up on a mountain. And he called to him those whom he desired.

And they came to him. And he appointed 12, whom he also named apostles, so that they might be with him. And he might send them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons.

How does Jesus respond to this plot, this opposition to kill him? He responds first by appointing these 12 men.

[8 : 46] Do you find that strange? 12 men who he calls apostles in verse 14. The word apostle means sent. And notice, just look at 14 again.

So that they might be with him. That's significant. With him during his earthly ministry. In other words, they might be his special eyewitnesses.

Who see his life. Who see his death. Who see his resurrection. So that they might preach. This is not everyone. He has a number of people following him at this point.

He's already called some of these disciples to follow him. This is not about them being disciples.

This is about them being apostles. There are 12. He chooses 12. That they might go out.

And preach. Him. To the world. And have authority to cast out demons. We'll come back to that bit in a minute. Notice. Jesus, therefore, is completely unfazed.

[9 : 48] By this plot. To kill him. To destroy him. He just gets on with his mission. Look down at 3 verse 7.

What's the first thing he does? He withdraws. With his disciples. To the sea. He withdraws from his opponents. He leaves them behind.

In the dust. And Mark is very. Very keen to show us. And careful to record. What happens as he withdraws. Mark.

The way Mark communicates. Is he puts stuff next to each other. And asks us to consider why.

We've got this plot in 3 verse 6. What then happens?

Jesus withdraws. And you see what happens? Crowds are flocking to him. From miles and miles away. Like Idumea.

[10:41] The Jordan. Tyre and Sidon. This is 100 miles. Eight days journey on a donkey. Of course they are. Because they've heard that. There is someone who can heal every disease.

Crowds are flocking to him. So that he can't even. Stand on the ground. And he gets. He asks his disciples to get the boat ready. Unless they crush him. Because they're trying to press.

Towards him. To touch him. To be healed. And notice it's not just people. But the demons themselves. Are falling down before him. It seems they cannot help it.

But when they see him. They have to fall down. And cry out. You are the son of God. Well they can see who he really is.

Even if the people at that point can't. The point I think. Is that nothing will stop Jesus. That the Pharisees and the Herodians.

[11:39] They can make their plot. It will be vain. The kingdom of God will advance. Regardless. Notice he withdraws again for a second time in verse 13.

He goes up on the mountain. And this time he withdraws from the crowd seeking healing. He goes up on a mountain to appoint his 12 apostles to go out and preach.

Now this is very important. Note his agenda which he will not be distracted from. He does not stay with this massive crowd. To heal the rest of them.

Instead he withdraws. Up a mountain. To appoint his 12 apostles to preach. Why? The point is the same point.

That Jesus made. Back in chapter 1 verse 38. Just flick back to chapter 1 verse 38. The same situation. People come looking for him. And they're looking for healing.

[12:42] And instead of going back to them. He says verse 38. Let us go on to the next towns.

That I may preach there also. For that is why I came. And so we are seeing the Lord Jesus' priority to preach.

He will not be distracted from it. And here as he appoints his 12 apostles. He says this is how my kingdom will advance. Through their word.

Now this is clearly. I think this is clearly more important than we would think. If we were writing the account of Jesus' life. We'd put this as an appendix perhaps.

But it comes in chapter 3. The Lord Jesus appoints these 12 men. As a matter of priority. Within weeks of his. The beginning of his ministry. Not at the end.

But at the beginning. Why? Because it is through their message about him. That his kingdom will advance in the world. And these are the people who wrote the New Testament.

[13:50] And now. How often people question. The Bible. And the New Testament. You know. How do we know these things are true? These are the people who wrote the New Testament.

And we can see that from the beginning. It was Jesus' plan. That they would take him. And his message to the world. Do you see that? And so there is no other way.

To access or to know the Lord Jesus. The Son of God. Except through. The testimony of his 12 chosen. Apostles. You want to know the real Jesus?

There's only one way. Come to his apostles' words. In the Bible. Notice also. The number 12.

If you notice that. As we read. It's mentioned twice. He appointed 12. In verse 14. He appointed the 12. In verse 15. Is that a familiar number to anyone. Who's perhaps read the Old Testament.

[14:53] That God's dealings with his people. Yes of course. There were 12 tribes. The number 12. I mean Jesus could have chosen any number. Couldn't he?

Any number of apostles. Why 12? It's not an arbitrary number. Is it? Deliberately chosen by Jesus. What's the point? The point is that he's appointing.

12 new. Named figureheads. Of a new Israel. The true Israel. Israel. The people of God. As the old Israel rejects him.

3 verse 6. The leadership. Jesus says. No matter. I'm starting afresh. With a new Israel. But with one key difference.

It will not be through the flesh descendants. You know how old Israel. In the Old Testament. It was the 12 tribe figureheads. And it was through their flesh descendants.

[15:59] That God would build his people. That's what happened in the Old Testament. One key difference. It's not going to be through their flesh descendants. Through these 12 figureheads. But through their message.

Through their message. Verse 14. They were sent out to preach. Through their message. That God will build. His new people. The new Israel.

Therefore. Will be a spiritual people. Founded on the message. Of his apostles. And that is exactly. What we have seen happening.

In the last 2,000 years. As people have flocked. To. The Bible. And lives transformed. By its message.

So firstly. The kingdom of God. We see here. Fundamental principle. Number one. It will advance. Through the apostles word. In fact. The new people of God. Will be built on their word.

[16:59] Number two. The second principle. Fundamental principle. Of the advance of the kingdom. That we see in chapter 3. The kingdom will advance. Because. The son.

Has bound Satan. Just look down. At verse 27. But no one. Can enter a strong man's house. That's Satan. And plunder his goods. Unless. He first binds. The strong man. Then indeed. He may plunder.

His house. The coming of the Messiah. Jesus. Has brought. The defeat. Of Satan. The real. Voldemort. The true. Sauron. Satan. Who has held. Humanity. Under his. Dark. Iron. Grip.

[17:53] For centuries. Since. Genesis 3. The Lord Jesus. The son comes.

And at his coming. He binds. Satan. In heaven's. Unbreakable. Chains. As it were. He enters. Satan's.

Palace. And ties him. To his evil throne. Satan. Who's enjoyed. Unopposed. Reign. And held. Humanity. Under his dark spell. At the coming of Christ.

Has been defeated. And there is nothing left. For Satan now. But for him to thrash around. In his chains. And watch on helplessly.

As the Lord Jesus. Plunders. His kingdom. They come to him. With an accusation. In verse 22.

[18:47] Don't they? Just look down. They come and say. This Jesus. He's possessed by Beelzebul. That's why. He's able to cast out demons. It's the best they can do.

They can't deny. That he casts out demons. And so they take. The only available option. To them. Bar one. By the prince of demons. Therefore. He must be casting out demons.

Well. Jesus's response. To them. Exposes. Their foolishness. And it's. It's laser logic.

If Satan were divided against Satan. His kingdom would have fallen long ago. Verse 24. Satan is not stupid.

Whoever heard of a human general. Commanding his guns to fire on his own troops. You know. As if Napoleon. At the battle of Waterloo.

[19:47] Would suddenly turn to his cannons. And say. Turn and fire on our own. Infantry. It's never happened. In human history. And if not men.

Then how much less. Satan. The evil genius. Who stands behind all of these things. What an absurd suggestion. That Satan would fight. Fight himself. Well. Rule out the absurd.

Jesus says. And the only option. You're left with. Is verse 27. If I'm able to cast out demons. You can see that I am.

That can mean only one thing. I'm stronger. And I'm on the other side. And so what does it mean.

That the Messiah has come. It means. Satan's time is now over. His grip is released. His hands are tied. By heaven's. Unbreakable chains.

[20:47] You'll remember some. Some of us will remember. Saddam Hussein. Who was captured in 2003. And executed in 2006. Satan. Has been captured.

Defeated. Yet to be destroyed. When the Lord Jesus comes again. And that is the age we live in. A defeated Satan.

Waiting. His destruction. Isn't that wonderful news? And Jesus is plundering his house. Verse 27. What does that mean?

Well one by one. People are being set free. From the grip of Satan. As Jesus cast out demons. On earth. He pictured the work that he's doing. To set people free.

From the captivity. Of Satan. If you're a Christian here today. You are plunder. And so am I. Plunder from Satan's house.

[21:46] How is this happening? Well Mark communicates. This is really important. Okay. Mark communicates.

By putting one thing. Next to another. And saying. Why. Think. Why have I put these things together? Why the appointing of the 12 apostles. And the defeat of Satan.

And the plundering of his house. Side by side. Because. It is through the preaching of the gospel. The apostles message. That the Lord Jesus.

Is plundering. Satan's house. That is why. You see in verse 15. Preaching. And the authority to cast out demons. Went hand in hand.

Do you see that verse 15? Preach the gospel. Authority to cast out demons. It's the same actually. In one verse 39. Jesus went preaching. And through the synagogues. Casting out demons.

[22 : 44] It was the same. At the beginning. Of chapter one. When Jesus went into the synagogue. Taught. And cast out demons. Why? It is a visual aid. Jesus is saying.

It is through my message. The gospel. That Satan's kingdom. Is rolled back. That people are rescued. Out of his grip. It's not that everyone.

Has a demon. And needs to be exercised. It was a visual aid. This is what I've come to do. People. Released. Once and for all. From Satan's grip.

Through the message. Of the apostles. Through the gospel. What then is the thing. That Satan fears most. The Bible.

I'll just bring an illustration. From chess. I'm a bit of a geek. When it comes to chess. I do quite like it. Not very good. And sometimes you. If you play chess.

[23 : 44] You'll make a move. This happens to me quite a lot. You make a move. And you realize. It's a terrible mistake. And your opponent. Just. They just need to see. The one move. And the next move. Is checkmate.

And you just have to watch. There's nothing you can do. You watch. As they find that move. And then. Then it's all over. Well that is the position. That Satan is in. He is defeated. And the move. That he fears the most.

Is the preaching. And teaching of the gospel. He can do nothing but watch. As the Lord Jesus. Plunders his house. It's not actually miracles.

Or healings. That Satan fears. It's not actually going around. And doing exorcisms. No. It's the word of the apostles. The gospel message.

Why is there such pressure. On you. In your workplace. Or your school. To keep the Bible closed. Do you feel that?

[24 : 40] Do you feel the pressure. To do that? Well it's because. The one thing. Satan fears above all. Is an open Bible. Thirdly.

The kingdom will be filled. With the new people of God. And these two. Flow out. This final point. Flows out of those two points. Just look down.

At verse 34. Jesus looks about. At those sat around him. And said. Here are my mother. And my brothers. For whoever does the will of God.

He is my brother. And sister. And mother. And with these words. Jesus. Redefines. The people of God. Do you see this?

How his blood family. His flesh family. Those who he's related to. Verse 31. Are outside. His mother and brothers come. So Mary's there. Some of his brothers. And they're saying.

[25 : 41] Could you bring him out. Bring him out to us. Jesus doesn't come out. Instead he says. He looks around. At those sat around him. In other words.

Those who've received him. And accepted him. As their Lord and Savior. And says. This is my family. Now of course. You know. Mary and his brothers. Many of them.

Come to. Are also. Come to faith. But Jesus is saying. It's not. They're not my family. Because of. They're related. They're related to me. My family.

Are those. Who've accepted me. As Lord and Savior. That's the point. And so with that. The Son of God. Declares. That the people of God. Are no longer so.

By birth. As they had been. In the Old Testament period. Descendants of Abraham. But verse. Thirty. Thirty five. Thirty. Where are we?

[26 : 36] Sorry. Verse. Thirty five. Yes. Verse thirty five. For whoever. Whoever. Whoever does the will of God. That word.

And with that word. He flings open. The gates of heaven. To anyone. What is the will of God now? Verse thirty five. What is the will of God.

In this new age? Well simply this. To repent. And believe in the gospel. That's what Jesus has been preaching. Since chapter one. Verse fifteen.

To receive Jesus. As Lord and Savior. And to follow him. That is the will of God. That is what they had done. And so. The kingdom of God. Will be filled with the new.

Redefined people of God. Defined no longer by birth. But by response to Jesus. More than that. They will be his family.

[27 : 32] Do you see that? In verse thirty four. The son of God. Does not call them subjects. But brothers. Brothers. Sisters. And mothers.

Put all of this together. What are we seeing? The big message. The big message of this chapter. The age that we now live in. The age that we now live in.

Is the age in which people. Are being set free from Satan. To come into the forgiven. The family of God. The family of God. People from all nations.

The spiritual family of God. Whoever. Does the will of God. Whoever repents and believes in the gospel. Will.

Well what is the unforgivable sin? What of this unforgivable sin? In verse twenty nine. Whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit. Never has forgiveness. But is guilty of an eternal sin.

[28 : 36] I wonder if you've read that. And thought about it before. Well this is part of the same point. But on the negative side.

To be in or out. Of the people of God. Is no longer about birth. But about response to the Messiah. As they.

Those religious leaders. Of the time. As they accused him of having a demon. They were in the process. Of rejecting their Messiah. In no uncertain terms. The spirit that is in him.

Is not from God. But from the devil. They said. They were in the process. Of rejecting their Messiah. And Jesus. To those people. Gives this warning.

To reject the Messiah. After seeing him. And hearing him. As they were doing. To push him away. That is the most serious sin.

[29 : 38] Anyone can ever commit. It's not about saying something once. In a fit of madness. Okay. It's not about blurting something out.

You know. That's not the blasphemy against the spirit. That can't be forgiven. The spirit came down to witness. To the identity of the son of God. Chapter one. The spirit came down.

On the son of God. To witness to his identity. To blaspheme against the spirit. Therefore. Is to reject. The Messiah. Jesus. It's about.

A decision of the heart. To reject Jesus. As the Lord of our lives. And Jesus says. If you do that. And don't turn.

You will find. That you are guilty. Of an eternal sin. That never. Has forgiveness. You will put yourself. On the outside forever.

[30 : 38] Guilty. Doesn't bear thinking about. Now you won't stop Jesus. Jesus will fill his kingdom. The only thing you will achieve.

Is your own exclusion. And that forever. Forever. The people of God. Are defined now. On the basis. Not of blood. But on response. To Jesus. Concluding thoughts.

We must understand. The times we live in. Nothing can stop. The Lord Jesus. And the advance of his kingdom. The game is up. Satan is defeated. And people are being set free.

One by one. From Satan's grip. Into the family of God. Forever. Two implications of this. Firstly. The most powerful thing.

[31 : 36] We can do with our lives. Is to open the Bible. And get behind the preaching. And teaching of the apostles message. That is the most powerful thing. We can do with our lives.

In our workplaces. In Dunwich. To give our lives to that. Secondly. If you're a Christian.

You're plunder. Have you thought of it like that? You've been set free from Satan. By the son. To be in his family forever. Forgiven of all your sins.

You're plunder. What a fresh cause for Thanksgiving. This morning. Well. We're going to take just a couple of seconds.

To respond in silence. To some of these words of Jesus. And then I will pray. Let's take a couple of seconds. To respond in silence. Father. We thank you for the good news of the gospel.

[32 : 43] That the Lord Jesus has come. And has defeated Satan. The great enemy. Thank you that we live in the age. In which. People are being set free from him.

And brought back into your family. To be forgiven children. Forever and ever. Lord Jesus.

We want to thank you again. As believers in you. That we are plunder. And that you have plundered us. From Satan's house. You have rescued us.

We praise and thank you again. For your grace. In our lives. And Father. We do pray for any among us. Who. Have not yet responded.
To Jesus in repentance and faith. And we ask Lord. That you would. Grant. That gift of faith. And repentance. And we ask it in Jesus name.
[33 : 41] Amen.