

Mark 3:7-35

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[0 : 00] Please be seated. If you would turn back to Mark chapter 3, that would be just great. I make it on page 838.

This time in the service we have a look at the passage. If you're new with us, it's helpful to have a Bible open in front of you just to check that the preacher is not going off-piece. And as you turn to 838 and Mark 3 verse 7 to the end of the chapter, you might feel it would be a very good thing for us to have a happy harvest passage for this Canadian Thanksgiving weekend.

Something about the warmth of family or counting our blessings. That would be good. But instead we come to this passage which is full of danger and threat where the menace of lies and violence and death run right on the surface.

And I just want to say before we start that it's the darker things in Mark's gospel in which Jesus shines brighter and the clearer we see what's really going on.

And the worse the rejection and opposition to Jesus, the more it turns out to be good news for the entire world. And here we are in the early chapters of Mark's gospel.

[1 : 21] We've begun to see the majesty of Jesus Christ healing the most vulnerable, bringing forgiveness of sins, dealing with death and Satan.

And we've seen the way he does this with his kindness and grace. And last week we finished with chapter 3 verse 6 where the two groups who hate each other, the Pharisees and the Herodians, are united in one desire.

They want to kill him. That's where we finished last week. And what does Jesus do? Verse chapter 3 verse 7. He withdraws.

He withdraws in order to advance. In fact he withdraws to create a new people of God and to take us below the surface of opposition to what's really going on spiritually.

See this is the way of Jesus. He never hits his head on a brick wall. If people reject and oppose, Jesus keeps moving and finds people who will hear him and do the will of God.

[2 : 28] And you can see this throughout the history of the church. I can't tell you how remarkable this passage is as it takes us deeper.

And what Mark does is he gives us two pictures to understand ourselves and our world, but more particularly Jesus Christ. And the two pictures are simply of two creations and of two kingdoms. So point one, two creations, verse 7 to 19. With the death threats ringing in Jesus' ears, just look at verses 7 to 12.

Mark loves showing us how popular and attractive Jesus is. And it looks like the whole world is coming to him from all four points of the compass. This is the largest crowd in Mark's gospel, bigger than even John the Baptist.

And it's international. It's not just Jewish. Because Jesus has come with healing in his wings. And again we see the power and the grace of Jesus Christ.

[3 : 31] The same power and grace that we saw with God in creation. You see his power as he heals every sickness, every disease. He drives out demons who've taken possession of people.

And every healing and every disease and every disorder and every demon come up against the power of the creator and they are a no contest as Jesus restores people, minds and bodies.

Nothing is impossible for Christ. And we also see his kindness and grace. The crowd has done absolutely nothing to deserve this blessing. There's no faith mentioned on behalf of those who receive these healings.

There's certainly no worship going on in the crowd. They are there to get what they want from Jesus. And as they press into Jesus, his very life is threatened.

Did you notice that in verse 9? Verse 9 it tells us, Jesus says, Get a boat ready please. Because there's a very real danger. This crowd is going to crush me.

[4 : 38] And I know we read this quickly in a church service, but that's a word of great violence. And the irony of course is it is going to be through the death of Jesus that he will meet our deepest needs and bring the blessings of forgiveness and eternal life and hope for the future.

And that's why he silences every demon who screams out, You are the Son of God. It's not just because he won't have testimony that's unclean.

Because the demons know his power, but they don't know anything of his kindness and his grace. It's completely unimaginable to them. If we are...

The thing about Mark's gospel, if we're following along, we need to be brought right through the death of Jesus to see the love and the depths of his love and the lengths he will stoop for us, giving his own precious life so that we might live.

And here's the thing about this picture. When God first created the world, there was no resistance, there was no opposition, there was no hostility, there was no indifference to overcome.

[5 : 46] And God, as this world moved away from God and we rejected him, God could have destroyed that first creation and started again. It would be perfectly understandable if he did.

I mean, can you imagine creating a universe that turns around and rejects you? Understandably, he could have started again fresh, but he does not. Such is his love for us that he will not abandon us to our hostility or our unbelief or our indifference.

This is why Christ has come. He sends Jesus Christ into the old creation with all its evil and its sin and its darkness, not to bring destruction, but to bring life, to take away our sins so that we can be taken into the kingdom of God, to bring us out of the kingdom of darkness and into the kingdom of God by the forgiveness of sins.

And that is why the work of this new creation by Jesus Christ is infinitely more difficult than the first creation, and that is why it costs him his life. And that is why I think Mark uses the word, uses the language of creation.

If you look down at verse 14 and 16, the very next thing he does is he makes a new people of God. In verse 13, he goes up on the mountain as Moses did.

[7 : 05] He summons the 12 and he creates them as apostles. And in verse 14 and 16, the word appoints is not appoints. It's not he's hiring them for a job.

It's the creation word. It was used by God when he created the world. He made the world. And because these new 12 apostles, this new people of God, are a creation of Jesus Christ, he makes them 12 apostles.

Jesus doesn't just save a diverse group of individuals. He binds them together as a church under this 12. And how will Jesus exercise his authority in the new people of God?

It's through the 12 and through their testimony to Christ, which is one of the reasons we read the New Testament as the words of Christ. And then right at the end of this section, in verse 19, the last phrase, we meet Judas who betrayed him.

And it's a reminder that the grace of Christ creates a church in the midst of context, context of opposition and betrayal, even betrayal by his followers.

[8 : 13] And that's much better news than we could imagine. Because the new creation and the growth of the church depends on him and not us.

Because Christianity is not about what we do for God, but what God does for us. So two creations. And now we move to the second half of the passage, two kingdoms, verses 20 to 34.

This is such an important passage. And if you look down at verse 20, Jesus returns to Capernaum. People pack the house where he is to hear him.

And such is the press of people that Jesus doesn't have time even to eat. So in verse 21, his family and some of his followers see it and they try to put a stop to what Jesus is doing by physically grabbing him.

That's what the word sees means. They want to bind Jesus up physically. They want to do a Heimlich maneuver and drag him out of there. They want to bring him under their control.

[9 : 19] They want to deprogram him. And why is it? It's because they say he is out of his mind. It's the word for berserk.

He's lost his mind. He's beside himself. He's crazy. So Jesus' family and some of his friends need Jesus to stop saying and doing all these things for their own comfort.

What's very striking here is that the opposition to Jesus isn't from the outside of religious establishment. It's from the inside, from his own people. And what is it that lies behind all opposition to Jesus and his kingdom?

And the answer that we're about to get is that there is another kingdom. And in verse 22, Jesus tears the mask off his opposition. And in every confrontation with those who want to destroy him or stop him, Jesus is unfailingly kind and unfailingly truthful and always reveals what's really going on spiritually.

You know what it's like? If the police pull over someone for speeding, it's important for the police to know how to approach it, what's really going on. It could be, you know, a woman in the car who's in labour racing to the hospital.

[10:35] It could be a car stacked with drugs, weapons and criminals racing from a crime scene. What Jesus does in this confrontation is he lays bare what is at stake for all of us and gives us the clearest picture of who he is and why he's coming and what he's doing.

So in verse 22, we get the first official representatives from Judaism in Jerusalem. And they come down and they accuse Jesus of being demon possessed.

They say he is doing these works of power by the power of Satan, not by the power of God. There's no doubt in their mind that Jesus has power to heal, to cast out demons.

The way it reads here is they are constantly saying this. They have met in committee and they have decided they need to put a stop to Jesus. What shall we do, they say.

We can't deny his power. We can't deny the reality of the healings and the demon castings out.

When he heals, it just seems instantaneous and permanent and creates complete health.

[11:40] What we need is we need to find a message that will undermine his following. We need a slogan that will go viral. I know. He casts out Satan by the power of Satan.

It's a lie and they know it. But based on the Goebbels principle, you remember the head of propaganda for the Nazis, if you tell a big lie enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it.

Do you know, in another place in the Gospels, Jesus calls Satan the father of lies. It's why one of our only weapons is the weapon of truth, the truth of God's word.

I think what's important for us, let me just take a side tack here, that the impact of Jesus' miracles, which every one of his miracles are a picture of his new creation, often have the reverse effects on those who've decided to oppose him.

His miracles only deepen their rejection of him. And that's because Jesus never compels faith. He never forces forgiveness on any of us. Throughout the Gospel, whenever he does a creative act of power and love, sometimes it produces faith, but most often it deepens unbelief.

[12:59] And I say that because there are many people today who say, if only we could have miracles of power, people would just have to believe. But just look through this passage. The crowds don't believe. His family doesn't believe.

The religious authorities come up with the most vicious and malicious explanation they could. They say he's in league with Satan. That yes, he has power, but it comes from the most evil and disgusting source, Beelzebul, the god of manure.

And there's a special perversity in this. What they're saying, these religious leaders, is that Jesus is the enemy of God. That everything he does is a lie to deceive you.

You can't trust a word he says. He's not trustworthy. You would be spiritually stupid to follow him. It will lead you to hell. And what does Jesus do? His response is full of kindness and truth.

He reveals more deeply what's really going on. And he gives us a unique insight to the opposition he faces and we face and what Jesus has come to do about it. If you look down at the next few verses, Jesus says that Satan is a personal being with power and purpose and he has a kingdom which he rules and he enslaves people and he oppresses people by taking possession of them, by kidnapping them into his house.

[14:21] Satan is a murderer and the father of lies. He is a sponsor and promoter of all falsehoods and deceptions. He hates what's good.

He hates what's true. He hates what's right. And he is at constant war with God and his purposes. But the way he comes at us is not with fangs and pitchfork but with smooth lies to make us feel good about ourselves.

He is not God nor is he divine. He is a creature, superhuman maybe, but far stronger than we are. And Jesus has come to destroy the devil and all his works. He has come to bring the kingdom of God and that kingdom of God is an invasion of the kingdom of Satan. And the coming of Jesus shows that the kingdom of Satan is not just under attack but is being destroyed and disempowered and will one day pass away. Which brings us to the key verse which is 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 enter or he may plunder his house. [15:38] Here Jesus takes us very deep into his work. Satan he says is a strong man full of malice and cunning. He hates God and the way he works is he kidnaps people and holds them slaves in his house in his kingdom.

And the only way to freedom is for someone stronger than Satan to get in there to deal with Satan to bind him up and then to rescue those poor people. It's a graphic picture of what Jesus is doing in his ministry and it comes from Isaiah 49 where God himself says captives and plunder can be rescued and saved and when I do that you will know I am the mighty one.

What Jesus is saying to us here is full of danger and warning and it's also full of the happy hope of redemption and deliverance. Jesus pictures himself as the strongest man.

He says I am God I am the mighty one of Jacob and I am the strong man who has come to save you all of you who have been taken captive by Satan who is stronger than we are.

[16:47] And this has already been signalled to us in the gospel. You remember back in chapter 1 when John the Baptist said one who is mightier than I is coming one who is stronger than I. So Jesus is not just doing raids on Satan's kingdom and then leaving Satan in peace.

It is the conquest of one kingdom by the king of another kingdom who has come to destroy the devil and rescue all those who are held captive to him. It's intense stuff isn't it?

Do you remember the first miracle of Mark's gospel? Remember what it was? It was Jesus restoring the man who was driving out a demon and restoring the man who'd been possessed.

He comes as the strong man he conquers Satan and he rescues captives. That's what really happens. Every time anyone comes to believe Jesus Christ is Lord and begins to follow him in repentance and faith.

This week I was talking to a guy I met as we put out our garbage bins and he told me what was wrong with the world is that it was being led by the long people.

[17:56] Led by the wrong people that's right. What did I say? Doesn't matter. And then he cast his hand over like this he said they're all narcissists and sociopaths. He said what's needed is that we all be kind to one another and we all learn to get along.

It's amazing since I've heard such naivety and I want you to know that's not Jesus' view. If verse 27 is true Jesus does two things for us not just one.

He does not just rescue us from Satan's kingdom and then leave Satan in peace. He first has to invade Satan's kingdom and deal with the power and the rule and the evil of Satan then he rescues us and forgives us.

And if we don't begin to understand that we cannot understand Mark's gospel or the whole life and death of Jesus. It just won't make sense because that's what Jesus is doing in the cross.

He does something for us before he does something in us. He must first break in and overpower the one who has kidnapped us and then deal with the power of evil and only then can he rescue us and restore us to God.

[19:06] It is invasion conquest and then rescue and restoration. But we haven't finished the intense stuff yet. There's this solemn warning in verses 28 to 30.

Let me just read them and remind you of them can I? Truly I say to you all sins will be forgiven the children of man in 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.

So what is this sin? What is this unforgivable or eternal sin? I mean if Jesus is the son of man on earth with authority forgives sins how can there be one that he doesn't forgive? I'll point out a couple of things.

The very fact that Jesus gives this warning is a mark of his grace. Jesus is warning these people who want to kill him so that they will not put themselves beyond forgiveness.

It's an invitation to pull them back from the cliff. But the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is not just a one-off episode. It's an ongoing way of life. It's a settled attitude of heart to Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit through him.

[20 : 20] It's not the sin we commit before we repent and turn to him. It's the steady hardening of our hearts to everything to do with the Holy Spirit. It's not any particular word or deed that we fall into but it's putting ourselves in the place of refusing forgiveness from him.

And if anyone here who can hear me is troubled that you may have committed this sin the very fact that you're troubled by it demonstrates the work of the Holy Spirit in you.

Repent and you will have the forgiveness you need. And later on in the Gospel Peter who denies Jesus three times repents and is restored to Jesus. The Apostle Paul who wars against the church trying to kill Christians he repents and is restored to Jesus.

Here is a quote. It's not that God refuses to forgive it's that the person who sees good as evil and evil is good is quite unable to repent and thus to come humbly to God for forgiveness.

And there is no way to forgiveness other than by the path of repentance and faith. We go over these verses but the truly remarkable thing is verse 28.

[21 : 32] Truly I say to you all sins will be forgiven the children of man. Whatever blasphemies we utter that's simply staggering. It comes from the sheer grace and goodness of God.

There is nothing we can do to make ourselves forgivable but that's what Jesus has come to achieve on our behalf and for us to receive by faith.

He wants us to know that every sin will be forgiven and if you come to him in repentance and faith he will do that for you. I mean you may feel that you have done things that are just terrible and unforgivable that exclude you from the kindness of God.

You may feel that Satan is binding you and the darkness is very much around you. It is not so. It doesn't matter what you've done Jesus opens the door if we return to him forgiveness and faith he says come to me all who are weary and heavy laden I will give you rest.

If you ask him now in your heart he will forgive you. This is what he says. And why is this here at the end of Mark 3 for us? I think it's because this is what's really going on as Jesus creates a new people of God.

[22 : 51] It's not a neutral activity. There is no such thing as spiritual neutrality to Jesus. He deals with evil he deals with Satan he carries us into the kingdom of the Father he makes us his children he makes us his family in the last verses he binds us to each other as his people.

And through the cross Satan is defeated Jesus has defeated Satan. But we wait until the second coming for the full destruction of Satan and his kingdom.

And in the meantime he is at war with Christ and his purposes. And this is how he works. He works very hard to make us imagine we don't really need to repent we can't repent we can't trust Jesus Jesus won't forgive us.

He works by making us distrust the power and love of Jesus or you can never be forgiven for the sins you're messing with. But Jesus again he says I have authority on earth to forgive sins and we need to go to him we need to go to him and ask him to strengthen us to resist Satan daily to cling to Christ our King his promises that he will crush Satan under our feet.

And I know Satan hates the truth and he hates Christians who pray and he hates those who persevere in the faith throughout their life. He hates it when people are plundered from his grasp he hates the idea of a church plant he hates the idea of unity in the Christian fellowship.

[24 : 19] Point of Mark 3 is that Jesus is the mighty one. He's the bringer of the new creation. He's the bringer of the kingdom of God. He's stronger than Satan he's stronger than all the power of sin and evil in this world.

And he has all the power of heaven to hold us to guide us to cleanse us to free us and finally take us to be with him forever. And we need to call on him repeatedly to do that even today.