

The Call and Concerns for the Servant-King

Mark 3:7-35

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Turn to Mark 3:7-35

Jesus was incredibly popular at this point in his ministry. There never was anything like this in the land of Judea. There had been preachers before, but none like this one. There'd been people before who claim the power of miracles, but no one like Jesus. And they were coming to him from all over the land. Some perhaps might have taken a week or two to get there with sick people. They were pressing; they were trying to get near him; they want to touch him. They have heard stories; they've seen the results of what he can do. Some scholars insist that tens of thousands were present. Add to this those who traveled from all over and you have a picture of huge enormous multitudes. It was a massive response. And people that have traveled far will not be denied. Waves and waves of people, all demanding attention.

And it is in this setting that Jesus decides that he must withdraw from the crowds. Why? Mark tells us that so great with the multitudes pressing toward Christ that he was in physical danger.

We know from chapter 1 that Jesus primary ministry was to preach the gospel of the kingdom calling for repentance and belief. Healing was only secondary.

This immense pressure came from two types of people: the sick and the demon possessed. It is interesting that the demons are somehow drawn to Jesus even though they know he will cast them out. Jesus felt the pressure, and so can understand the pressure we feel as well. Jesus knows what it's like to be yelled at on the road. Jesus knows what it's like when we share the gospel only to be mocked in response. Jesus very much understands our lives of faith.

And so in this context Jesus does an extraordinary thing. He goes up to a mountain and calls twelve disciples to go with him.

Jesus has called most of them before, some as long as 18 months ago. They have been following him since that time, off and on. As far as we know, it wasn't a full-time following. We know Peter had a wife and mother-in-law. We've already been introduced to them. No doubt Peter would have gone back and forth from his home and spent time with Jesus and then back again. But now Jesus is calling twelve disciples. He still sometimes calls them disciples, but sometimes now they're going to be called apostles. And he is preparing them that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to cast out demons. That, by the way, is the definition of the apostle: sent out one. This little group of men is the beginning of the New Testament church that will grow and expand through all the world, even to us this morning. We are a result of what Jesus did here on this mountain.

Notice that Jesus goes up on a mountain. I don't want to spend much time on this, but mountains are sometimes significant in the history of redemption. Revelation is often revealed on a mountain. Perhaps it's just as simple as Jesus needed to get away, but throughout the Scriptures many great things are revealed to us on mountains.

And we see him chose twelve. Is that significant? I don't know, but every Jew would know the significance of the number twelve. Twelve was the number of the tribes of Israel. And so to a Jew understanding this might immediately say that Jesus was appointing a new Israel, having some measure of continuity with ancient Israel but also a distinct newness.

In his book, "The Training of the Twelve", A. B. Bruce reminds us that Jesus didn't choose rabbis, or religious leaders. Jesus chose normal men. And many of them would die as martyrs for the faith.

These men had no significance whatsoever except that Jesus called them.

And then he went home. And the crowd gathered again so pressed in that they could not even eat. And when his family heard about it, they went out to seize him for they were saying, "He is out of his mind." This is an extremely strong expression, "out to seize him". His brothers and sisters had come down to Capernaum with the sole intention of forcibly taking him under control and hauling him back to Nazareth. His own family, probably with the exception of his mother, thought he had lost his mind. "Our brother Jesus is delusional", they said. John's Gospel tells us that even at the very end of Jesus ministry his own brothers were not believing in him (John 7:5). The fact that his family was attributing to him insanity, and that many continued for the rest of their lives is of great importance in our passage this morning.

And now the scribes pile on. They had probably been sent out to look at Jesus work. My guess is that they came with their minds already made up, since there is no evidence of true data-gathering questions. And in that mental posture they had made two determinations:

- he is possessed by Beelzebub, and
- by the prince of demons he cast out the demons

These are vicious attacks. They are accusing Jesus of being demon possessed. Jesus was according to them, a son of Satan. Jesus was simply a demon possessed warlock master of the black arts.

And Jesus responds in verses 23 – 27.

Using two parables, Jesus explains the impossibility of both of their charges. Certainly only one stronger than Satan can cast out demons and free the victims. Jesus is the one who has entered Satan's house, bound him, and loosed the captive souls. Jesus appeals to logical argument to answer the Scribe's accusations and this seems to end the conversation immediately.

And then Jesus gives them, and us, a frightening warning in verses 28 – 30. The question now for us is: what is this unforgivable sin, this unforgivable blasphemy against the Holy Spirit?

R.C Sproul writes. "Blasphemy involves speaking a word against God. It is a verbal sin, one that is committed with the mouth or the pen. It is desecration of the holy character of God. It can involve insulting Him, mocking Him, or dishonoring Him. In a sense, it is the opposite of praise. Even casually using the name of God by saying, "Oh, my God," as so many do, constitutes blasphemy. We can be very thankful that the unpardonable sin is not just any kind of blasphemy, because if it were, none of us would have any hope of escaping damnation. All of us have, at many times and in many ways, routinely blasphemed the name of God."

But what of blasphemy against the Spirit? I can tell you what it is not.

- It is not sexual sin or homosexuality.
- It is not saying, “oh my God”.
- It is not suicide.
- It is not murder, or multiple murders.
- It is not any normal blasphemous behavior, for Paul identified himself as a blasphemer, and was saved.

To understand this difficult saying, we need to see that it came in the context of Jesus’ opponents charging Him with doing his work by the power of the Devil rather than by the power of the Holy Spirit. However, they were not slandering the Spirit—not quite. Their statements were directed against Jesus.

So, he said to them: You can blaspheme me and be forgiven, but when you question the work of the Spirit, you are coming perilously close to the unforgivable sin. You are right at the line. You are looking down into the abyss of hell. One more step and there will be no hope for you. He was warning them to be very careful not to insult or mock the Spirit.”

The Scribes here are at the very brink of committing the sin, because they were saying that the Holy Spirit witness to Christ through his exorcisms and miracles were really the work of Satan. If their attitude had become permanent, they would have crossed the line.

Have there been people who have committed the unpardonable sin? I believe the answer is yes. There have been men and women who rejected the Spirit’s testimony regarding their own condition, and the person and work of Christ so consistently, that their hearts became unable to believe.

I also believe that the unforgivable sin, is a sin that requires knowledge. In this case the Scribes were accredited theological teachers of God’s people. Their daily business was the Scriptures and they were therefore subject to the constant witness of the Holy Spirit who inspired this Scriptures. It is not the ignorant unbeliever “man on the street” who is in danger of committing this sin, but the man or woman in the church who knows the Scriptures.

There is a deliberate refusal of the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit, and the gospel of Jesus Christ. The spirit has revealed something, enabling you to glimpse your own condition and the treasure that is Jesus Christ; and there is a deliberate pushing it away, there is an apostasy per se.

Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones in his ministry in Westminster Chapel in London said this was the most fearful text in all the Bible that caused more pastoral problems than any other text that he knew of, Hebrews chapter 6 verses 4, 5, and 6. “For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.”

This is more than simple unbelief. There is a thoughtful, specific, and deliberate rejection here. It is a deliberate blasphemy of the Holy Spirit’s work.

Let's finish this morning with verses 31 through 35.

Jesus is still inside this house and has just made this statement regarding the unforgivable sin.

Picture this. At the center of these crowds are the newly chosen apostles, probably hanging on Jesus every word. In contrast to them are the Scribes who are also hanging on every word looking for ways to trap our Lord. Others were there begging for grace and healing. All sorts of mankind is represented in the small house. And outside the door, probably very nervous, was Jesus' family. They are the ones, you remember, who had been making accusations in verse 21. And now they can't get inside. And so they send someone else, a messenger, to let Jesus know they are here.

"Your mother and your brothers are outside seeking you." And we must understand that in Middle Eastern culture, family is of the utmost importance. And Jesus utters another bombshell.

Let's get something straight at this point. Jesus does have a real family. He had a mother. He had a stepfather. He had brothers and sisters. And there is tension in this family: they don't believe Jesus. They are accusing him of being insane, at least his brothers and sisters are. And no one loved his mother more than Jesus. Do you remember his words on the cross? As Jesus is dying for your sins and my sins he speaks to John and he says to Mary his mother, "Behold your son?" And John, "Behold your mother?" There is tenderness, there is thoughtfulness, and there is sadness, for no one loved his mother more than Jesus

So what did Jesus mean by this? Jesus meant that there is a deeper familial relationship than flesh and blood. There is a spiritual relationship that is characterized by obedience to the father.

His relationship to God, his calling to be the Savior of sinners was more important to him than even those earthly relationships. Jesus didn't put family first: he was the divine Messiah first. His call to be obedient to the father came first and everything else, even his relationship to his mother, came second.

Jesus has just created a new family. Jesus is doing an unthinkable thing. He looks around at the faces that are sitting before him in this house and with outstretched arms declares, "Here are my mother and my brothers." This will be a different kind of family.

Calvin in his *Institutes* makes this statement, "No one can have God as his father who doesn't have the church as his mother." Calvin is reminding us that there is something about the church, there is something about the fellowship of God's people that unites us together, that is precious.

And then Jesus defines what that is in verse 35.

Obedience does not create the relationship with God - that is faith. But obedience is a sign of it. The new family is far superior to the human family, for it is eternal.

- It is stronger
- it is more satisfying
- it is more demanding

And those who are his spiritually are far dearer to him than his human family. This is an incredible statement.

This became very evident to me in my own life when at some point in my Christian transformation it became evident to my mother that Jesus and the church were the most important things in my life. I remember that she was very hurt by it. She didn't understand. How could she?

And some of you don't understand. How could you? Because you are not part of this family.

- Have you been obedient to the command to come to Jesus Christ in faith and in repentance?
- Have you been obedient to take him as your Lord and Savior?
- Have you done that?
- Do you belong to Jesus family this morning?
- Do you belong to the household of God?
- Are these, your brothers and sisters, more precious to you than any other relationship in the world?

May God make it so!

Tammy Harris of Roanoke, Virginia, began searching for her biological mother when she turned 21. A year of searching proved fruitless. Tammy did not realize, however, that her mother, Joyce Schultz, had been searching for her for 20 years--the same Joyce Schultz who worked alongside her at the same convenience store. When Joyce overheard Tammy speaking with another coworker about her search for her biological mother, Joyce's ears perked. The two compared stories and birth certificates. When the coworkers realized they were, indeed, mother and daughter, "We held on for the longest time," Tammy said. "It was the best day of my life."

My testimony is that the best day of my life, was the day I was adopted into the family of God. Over many years now my brothers and sisters in Christ have become dear and precious to me.

I pray that you would not simply sit side-by-side, week-after-week, in a seat next to someone, but that you would realize the depth of relationship you share in Jesus Christ.