

Connect360: The Unforgiven

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- *Lesson 12 in the BaptistWay Press Connect 360 unit "The reMARKable Journey Begins" focuses on Mark 3:20-30.*

"Whose side are you on?" Most of us have heard the question at one time or another. We might even have voiced it in a moment of frustration. Maybe it occurred in a discussion at work, when a boss became exasperated with an employee who raised objections every time a new idea was presented. Or perhaps we were part of a team in which the question was directed toward one team member who failed to put forth as much effort as everyone else. In effect, it is a question about commitment and allegiance: "Where do your loyalties really lie?"

In this passage, the religious leaders of Jesus' day did far more than question whether Jesus was acting in obedience to God. They looked at the wondrous miracles Jesus performed, bringing light into the lives of hurting people, and attributed Jesus' power to the forces of darkness. They saw the good Jesus did and called it evil.

Jesus' reputation had spread. The teachers of Jewish law came from Jerusalem to Galilee, and they harshly condemned Jesus and his ministry. They said he was possessed and was casting out demons by the prince of demons. The religious leaders not only denied Jesus was acting under the power of God, but also accused Jesus of being in league with Satan. If Jesus appeared to be casting out demons, it was only to make room so a more powerful evil spirit could enter a victim, they asserted.

Jesus refuted the accusation of the religious scholars by demonstrating their lack of logic. He pointed out that neither a divided kingdom nor a divided household can stand. Jesus essentially said it was foolish to suppose

Satan would wage war against the demons acting on his own behalf. It made no sense to point to the devil as the cause behind a person's release from demonic torment.

Powerful parable

To illustrate His point, Jesus used a brief parable. Suppose a thief wanted to rob the home of a powerful person. Before the robber would attempt to carry off the homeowners' possessions, he first would subdue the strong man, Jesus said. It is important to remember parables typically are intended to illustrate one central teaching. Unlike an allegory, where every detail of the story carries symbolic meaning, parables are meant to make one point. So, we should not be surprised when a character in a story assumes an unexpected identity.

In this instance, Satan was the strong man, and Jesus was the one who overpowered him, tied him up and carried off what Satan had possessed. Jesus was making the point that Satan is no weakling. The devil had possessed the lives of those who were suffering demonic torment. However, Jesus has the greater power to overcome Satan and carry away to freedom those whom the devil has claimed.

Too often, attitudes toward Satan gravitate toward one extreme or another. Some underestimate the power of evil. They may disregard biblical teachings about the devil as primitive superstition or reject the idea of evil as too simplistic in a world filled with nuance. Others become fixated on the satanic and attribute to the devil more power than he possesses.

The Bible points to a middle ground. Evil is real, and temptations are strong. The devil wants to rob Christians of the joy of our salvation. He wants to destroy our credibility when we seek to bear witness of Christ. However, the Bible presents Satan as a defeated enemy living on borrowed time. Christ is the victor, and his triumph over all the forces of darkness is

assured. We should be vigilant and stand strong to resist temptation, but we have no reason to fear satanic power.

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