

# Explore the Bible: Unites

February 27, 2019

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for March 17 focuses on Mark 3:23-35.*

Those who recognize in Jesus only his love, mercy and compassion have failed to do justice to the full portrait of Jesus painted by the writers of the Gospels. The Gospel of Mark provides numerous examples in which Jesus exhibited these traits to an unrivaled degree. Mark, however, has painted his portrait of Jesus on a backdrop of conflict. Jesus' initial message, "The kingdom of God is near" (Mark 1:15), announced not just a message of hope but one of inevitable conflict. The reign of God had arrived and would challenge the kingdom of the enemy for control of this world.

Against this backdrop, it should come as no surprise that Jesus never shrinks back when these kingdoms clash. The image of the loving and compassionate servant is eclipsed by the powerful and confrontational agent of the kingdom (Ironically, these two sides will be brought together in a single portrait in Mark's Gospel when the powerful and authoritative Son dies on a cross as the suffering Servant. That is yet to come, though.). In this particular section of Mark, we the readers are invited to wade into the combat and choose sides. The stakes are high, though, so choose wisely.

## Undivided House (Mark 3:23-30)

"Absurd!" Although Jesus did not use the word, he certainly expressed the sentiment in his opening salvo against the teachers of the law who had come down from Jerusalem. They had come to Galilee to challenge this usurper to the established order. They thought they were on the right side of this conflict of kingdoms, but Jesus would reveal to them that they were

not. As Mark will disclose later in this passage, they were not the only ones.

The teachers of the law struggled for an explanation as to how Jesus performed the feats popular acclaim credited to him. He certainly did not have the stamp of approval from the only source they trusted: the Jewish religious leadership in Jerusalem! "By the prince of demons he is driving out demons," they concluded and proclaimed (3:22).

Jesus rebuffed this charge by exposing three problems: the absurdity of the charge (3:23-26), the misinterpretation of events behind the charge (3:27) and the peril of such a charge (3:28-30). Jesus made the absurdity of the charge rather clear. Jesus could not be considered an agent working *for* the kingdom of Satan while actively working *against* the same kingdom. Surely Satan had not proven to be so foolish and incompetent a foe as to undermine his own kingdom. No one would have agreed with this conclusion.

Obviously, something was happening; the teachers of the law could not deny it. Their assessment of what was happening, though, was the second problem. Jesus offered his own assessment: Satan, the strong man, was having his house plundered! A stronger man from a stronger kingdom was reclaiming people for himself and his kingdom (3:27).

Jesus' correction of the religious leaders culminated in his warning of their perilous position (3:28-30). Jesus had presented sufficient evidence to demonstrate that the Holy Spirit was at work among them through himself. No other explanation made sense. If the teachers of the law continued in their obstinate refusal to recognize the power of the Holy Spirit at work in and through Jesus, they demonstrated such an attitude of rebellion against God's plan and kingdom that they had no place in his rule. God alone could extend forgiveness but only to those who would accept his means for forgiveness: allegiance to Jesus Christ who would give his life as a ransom for sin (Mark 10:45). Failure to God's agent and means had implications not

only for this age but the coming one.

*Have you committed the unpardonable sin? If you have accepted God's provision of Jesus for your sin, then no. The Holy Spirit is he who testifies of this provision (see 1 John 4:1-3).*

## **Misunderstood by Family (Mark 3:31-32)**

The teachers of the law were not the only ones to misconstrue the work of Jesus. The arrival of Jesus' mother and brothers at the house Jesus had entered marked the end of a journey Mark introduced in 3:21. They had come "to take charge of" (or "seize") him because "He is out of his mind" (3:21). The word behind this statement typically conveyed a sense in which one was unable to reconcile events with one's perception of reality (see Mark 5:42; Luke 2:47). While the Gospel writers leave us virtually no information about Jesus' life outside of his public ministry, his family certainly would have had firsthand knowledge of that life. They perceived that this new public persona of Jesus was not the Jesus they knew. He obviously had lost his grip on reality and needed to be restrained, so they thought.

According to verses 31-32, Jesus' family had arrived to take charge of him. As Jesus will demonstrate by his response (3:33-35), though, they presumed too much. Not only were they grossly misunderstanding the situation, they seemed to think their familial relationship with Jesus granted them some sort of special privilege. Such was not the case.

*Have you ever presumed that the Lord owed you some sort of favor or special consideration due to your family heritage, tithing record, faithful church service attendance, etc.?*

## United by Purpose (Mark 3:33-35)

This entire episode concludes with Jesus offering his own profound assessment of the entire situation. “Whoever does God’s will is my mother and sister and brother,” he says (3:35). Jesus made clear to the religious leaders whose side he was on, and in his response to his family’s request to see him, Jesus made clear to them and the crowd in the house that his relationships were defined not by blood but by devotion to God. Jesus’ closing statement brings these claims together: Whoever would seek God would find Jesus, and whoever would seek Jesus would only find him if they sought God.

*Mark has brought his readers to the point of decision. We are invited to choose our side. To stand with him is to stand with God. To stand with God is to stand only with him. So, will you stand with him or against him?*

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