

**Jesus accused by his family and by teachers of the law**

<sup>20</sup> Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. <sup>21</sup> When his family (the ones with him)<sup>1</sup> heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, 'He is out of his mind.'

<sup>22</sup> And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, 'He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons, he is driving out demons.'

<sup>23</sup> So Jesus called them over to him and began to speak to them in parables: 'How can Satan drive out Satan? <sup>24</sup> If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. <sup>25</sup> If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. <sup>26</sup> And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come. <sup>27</sup> In fact, no one can enter a strong man's house without first tying him up. Then he can plunder the strong man's house. <sup>28</sup> Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter, <sup>29</sup> but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin.'

<sup>30</sup> He said this because they were saying, 'He has an impure spirit.'

<sup>31</sup> Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. <sup>32</sup> A crowd was sitting round him, and they told him, 'Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.'

<sup>33</sup> 'Who are my mother and my brothers?' he asked.

<sup>34</sup> Then he looked at those seated in a circle round him and said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! <sup>35</sup> Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother.'

We see Jesus again going to someone's house with crowds following Him. The house was so full that there was no room for anyone to eat. It's a different lifestyle to how things are today. We saw in earlier weeks how people piled into the house where the paralytic was lowered through the roof because it was so crowded inside and outside. People in those days obviously felt they could just invade someone's house and park themselves inside to hear Jesus... the nearest thing to this today would be a crowd gate-crashing someone's house uninvited to see what was going on if there were a party with loud music and so many guests milling around that no one would really notice the uninvited ones.

The NIV says "His family heard about this" – the implication being they weren't with Him. The Greek says, "the ones with Him hearing this" so it could have been His disciples, but later Jesus is talking about His mother and brothers, so it could have been "family". They thought what was going was too much and wanted to remove Jesus from the mêlée thinking He was crazy to allow this to happen. Mary, being a good Jewish mother, would have been concerned that Jesus was unable to even to have his food because of the crowds.

Some commentators have speculated that because this is at the beginning of Mark's Gospel, His family had come to fetch Jesus back to do some work in His father's carpentry business and didn't see His career choice to go wandering about the countryside was a wise one. Jesus wasn't earning money and must have worked for a living before starting His ministry, and so abandoning the family seemed to them a poor choice. In Matthew's Gospel, the order of things is different. This episode is in chapter 12, after the Sermon on the Mount, after sending out the Twelve disciples on their own to heal and drive out demons, and before John the Baptist was beheaded. In Mark, who is the Gospel writer condensing aspects of Jesus's life that he (or his source Simon Peter) thinks are important, the pace of the story is the fastest.

Moving on to verse 22 there is a link between Jesus's family and/or disciples thinking He's a bit crazy, with the teachers of the law thinking the same for a different reason.

*And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, 'He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons.'*

None of the other Gospels mention that the Pharisees or teachers of the Law had come up to Galilee all the way from Jerusalem to check out Jesus. His reputation was already such that the top people had to come out to see for themselves what was happening. They saw the miracles, they saw the demon possessed being freed, they saw people who were mad being made whole again. No one could deny that Jesus had the power to heal physically and spiritually. The teachers of the law couldn't accept that Jesus had power from God, so they came up with a fatuous assertion to discredit Jesus. They claimed Jesus was possessed Himself by Beelzebul. What they meant was that the powers Jesus had were Satanic or of the devil himself.

The family of Jesus thought He was out of his mind and the scribes that He was possessed by the devil. Two wrong assumptions from people looking in from the outside, which Mark goes to prove are wrong. Mark wants to show us that we need see the Truth about Jesus to understand what He is doing and continues to be doing.

Verses 23 – 25

*<sup>23</sup> So Jesus called them over to him and began to speak to them in parables: 'How can Satan drive out Satan? <sup>24</sup> If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. <sup>25</sup> If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand.*

Jesus hears what the scribes are saying and calls them over. He starts with a question: "How can Satan drive out Satan?" This is an awkward question as everyone knew Satan was the deceiver, the destroyer, the one who seeks to bind people under his control so that they go mad, steal, lie, and kill. What would be the point of Satan releasing people he had bound, undoing what he had done to them? Jesus answers with two political statements: the first that a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand... Israel after King Solomon was divided, and the result was that the two kingdoms – first the northern tribes of Israel and then the southern tribes were defeated and the people sent into exile because of wars between them and wars with neighbours. Together they were strong: divided they were weak.

The second answer that a house divided against itself cannot stand is for the same reason. When the ruling family is divided, its power is lost as the family fights among its own members and is weakened until it falls. This may be an allusion to what happened when the royal families of Israel after Solomon fought among themselves, or it may be an allusion to King Herod the Great's family which divided the land into several parts after his death so that each had its own ruler: each too weak to fight the Romans on their own while others plotted with the Romans to maintain power as puppets of the Romans.

Jesus was saying that Satan's power wasn't collapsing because of internal divisions. Jesus was showing that the collapse was a result of people who were healed moving out of darkness into light, from death to life, from brokenness to wholeness. The reason for this is given in verse 27

*<sup>27</sup> In fact, no one can enter a strong man's house without first tying him up. Then he can plunder the strong man's house.*

Jesus says no one can remove someone from the grip of the devil unless he is stronger than the devil. Once bound the demons who possess people can be evicted and the devil's power will be reduced. Jesus is saying that all who are deceived, bound by sin and held captive can be set free. Jesus is invading the strong man's house so that He can remove those under the influence of sin and set them free.

In Matthew's Gospel, (1:21) the angel said to Joseph about Mary 'She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins.' Jesus is the Greek version of the Hebrew Joshua which means "God saves" Joshua in the Old Testament was one of the two (the other one was Caleb) men who survived the period of 40 years in the wilderness and entered the promised land. All the others who had lived in Egypt had died. None was left of the generation who had known what it was like being a slave under the oppression of the Egyptians. New generations who had never known slavery,

had never known the idolatry, wealth, and hardship of Egypt, entered the promised land led by Joshua. A new start for the twelve tribes of Israel united in worship of one God.

Jesus enables us to have a new start, cleansed from sin, forgiven and desiring to worship the same God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, David, the prophets, and the apostles. Jesus tells us He has come to plunder the earthly kingdom dominated by the devil (Matthew's Gospel 4:8-9 reveals that the devil has the power to give Jesus when He was tempted in the wilderness for 40 days, all the kingdoms of the world) and establish a new kingdom.

Moving on to verses 28-30

*<sup>28</sup> Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter, <sup>29</sup> but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin.'*

*<sup>30</sup> He said this because they were saying, 'He has an impure spirit.'*

Verse 29 has worried some Christians because Jesus says there is one unforgiveable sin, while all others are forgivable, however bad they might be. Verse 28 says we can be forgiven all our sins, which is a blessing and the reason why Jesus came into the world.

We need to look at what "blasphemy against the Holy Spirit" means. The scribes were saying that Jesus had an impure or unclean spirit... telling a lie about Jesus. We saw earlier in chapter one of Mark's Gospel when Jesus was baptised by John, that a voice from heaven said, 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.' and later that the demon said, 'I know who you are: the Holy One of God'. It is clear that Jesus did not have an impure or unclean spirit nor was He possessed by the devil. The literal meaning of the words "to blaspheme" is "to speak evil of" or "to slander". The scribes slandered Jesus by lying about Him. What they did came close to blaspheming against the Holy Spirit.

But the unforgivable sin is for someone to deny that Jesus Christ is from God and to maintain this belief permanently. Such hardness of heart makes those who continue to speak evil of God, the Son of God and Holy Spirit irredeemable if they never change their minds.

For all who may once have declared Jesus is imaginary, or not who He claimed He was without thinking carefully about what they're saying, when for example they were young and having Christian beliefs was definitely not cool or not acceptable in the company of people who had humanist, agnostic, or atheist beliefs. In this country to have Christian faith is seen by many as foolish and irrational, and so Christians are derided and mocked without any of the mockers realising they are mocking Jesus and one day must account for their words. While we are alive, we can always change our minds and accept Jesus as Lord and Saviour. Romans 10: 9-13

*If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup> For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. <sup>11</sup> As Scripture says, 'Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.' <sup>12</sup> For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile – the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, <sup>13</sup> for, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved'.*

If anyone has heard the Gospel and rejects its message of love, forgiveness and mercy and does not believe he or she can be saved and forgiven by Jesus, then because he or she has not asked for forgiveness means it won't be given. It is those who say that the Gospels are untrue, that Jesus was not the Son of God, that He is not alive after being crucified, that He is just a "good man who said some good things" – these people are lying about Jesus and Holy Spirit. Jesus says in Matthew 7: 7-8

<sup>7</sup> *'Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. <sup>8</sup> For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.*

The saddest part of the Gospels excepting the crucifixion is the continued enmity of the scribes, teachers of the Law and high priests towards Jesus. They lied about Him, tried to trap Him, tried to have Him killed for telling the Truth, and then asked to be accountable for His death, for which there would be no forgiveness unless they repented and accepted Jesus as the Messiah.

Matthew 27 :22-25 *'What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called the Messiah?' Pilate asked. They all answered, 'Crucify him!'* <sup>23</sup> *'Why? What crime has he committed?' asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, 'Crucify him!'* <sup>24</sup> *When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. 'I am innocent of this man's blood,' he said. 'It is your responsibility!'* <sup>25</sup> *All the people answered, 'His blood is on us and on our children!'*

Summing up on this point - blaspheming against the Holy Spirit – it is very hard for anyone who questions if she or he is condemned to have committed the unforgivable sin, to have completely opposed, rejected and slandered Jesus, the Messiah. Whoever has doubts on this issue will be redeemable: it is those without doubt and with a certainty in the non-existence of the Holy Spirit who are in trouble. There are verses later in chapter 11 of Mark's Gospel that indicate that unforgiveness towards others results in one's own sin not being forgiven. This is also found in Matthew's Gospel chapter 6: 14-15 after the Lord's Prayer.

<sup>14</sup> *For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. <sup>15</sup> But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.*

This admonition seems more severe than the concern Christians have about committing the unforgivable sin of blaspheming against the Holy Spirit. Holding grudges, not forgiving, and not understanding that whatever any one does that wrongs you, has to be forgiven to avoid all our prayers asking for forgiveness being ignored. We pray *"Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us"* regularly and few seem to be concerned that there can be no exceptions. There are no exceptions. We have to love our enemies. To have blasphemed, or slandered, the Holy Spirit, you have, however, to be those who have set their faces against God and who actively deny His existence and deny that Jesus as Son of God and deny that the Holy Spirit is part of the Trinity. Sadly that does include a lot of people who are unaware of the danger they are in, and makes it all the more important for us to advise them that Jesus loves them.

Verses 31-35

<sup>31</sup> *Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. <sup>32</sup> A crowd was sitting round him, and they told him, 'Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.'* <sup>33</sup> *'Who are my mother and my brothers?' he asked. <sup>34</sup> Then he looked at those seated in a circle round him and said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! <sup>35</sup> Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother.'*

At the beginning of this passage we're looking at, the family of Jesus apparently thought He was out of His mind. This is common in many families where one member of the family or a group of friends commits to following Jesus.

What is startling is that Jesus seems to prefer people outside His family to those inside His family. The whole history of Israel is that of a family – the descendants of Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob... the twelve tribes, all with a common ancestry. Lineage is important in establishing whether you're inside the family – a special people, chosen by God and to be blessed by God. By the time of Jesus, the Jews saw themselves as special, and everyone else as lesser people. The Romans found them fanatically proud about how close they believed themselves to their God, being unwilling to do anything forbidden by their God, and that they would rather die than offend their God. The cynical Romans found them a bunch of proud losers, many scattered in the Middle East, who didn't fit into their materialistic worldview who considered themselves

more blessed and special than anyone else. The descendants of Levi were even more special: thinking very highly of themselves because of their ancestry and position as the Jewish priesthood. Jesus turns this pride in ancestry and family upside down. Those who love God in spirit and in truth are the chosen people, not based on ancestry or family, but based on their love of God, and doing His will. The pointed remark about doing God's will implies that the Jews who were so proud of their ancestry and observance of the Law of Moses weren't doing God's will but doing what the Law obliged them to without love, mercy or understanding of the will of God.

As Jonathan mentioned last week, Mary the mother of Jesus was entrusted by Jesus on the cross to the care of the disciple John, rather than the brothers of Jesus who had an obligation to look after her. The disciples were called the brothers of Jesus, and as Christians we are family with all other Christians throughout the world. Jesus is offering to all mankind a new family bound together worshipping Him and doing His will. The Holy Spirit working in our lives will be made plain to others. The fruit of the Spirit is 'love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control'. These are the signs that we are in a new family that belongs to Jesus.

Amen