

Discussion Guide for Mark 3:20 - 4:09

By: Pastor Tim Dodson

Part 1: Jesus and His Family (Mark 3:20–21, 31–35)

- **Observation:** In verses 20–21, why do Jesus' family members come to take custody of him? What does this reveal about how his ministry was being perceived?
- **Interpretation:** Jesus redefines "family" in verses 33–35. What is the core requirement he gives for being part of his spiritual family?
- **Application:** How does it feel to know that doing God's will places you in the closest possible relational status with Jesus? Have you ever experienced tension with your biological family because of your faith?

Part 2: The Scribes and the Unpardonable Sin (Mark 3:22–30)

- **Observation:** What specific accusation do the scribes bring against Jesus? How does Jesus use logic (satan casting out satan) to defeat their argument?
- **Interpretation:** Jesus speaks about the "blasphemy against the Holy Spirit" (v. 28–30). Based on the context of the scribes attributing the Holy Spirit's work to a demon, how would you define this sin?
- **Application:** Believers often worry they have committed this sin. How does the rest of the New Testament (and the context here) offer reassurance to someone who is worried about their standing with God?

Part 3: The Parable of the Sower (Mark 4:1–9)

- **Observation:** Picture the scene by the sea. Why do you think Jesus gets into a boat to teach the crowd?
- **Interpretation:** List the four different types of soil Jesus mentions. What happens to the seed in each scenario?
- What part is ours in this parable? (answer: the condition of the soil) How do we manage this responsibility?

- What can we learn about the dynamic of evangelism from this story? (answer: throw out a lot of seed!)
- **Application:** Jesus ends with, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." What is the difference between simply hearing Jesus' words and truly *listening* to them? Which of the four soils best describes your heart during this current season of life?

COMMENTARY

3:20, 21 Jesus returned from the mountain where He had called His disciples to a Galilean home. Such a **multitude** gathered that He and His apostles were kept too busy to eat. Hearing of His activities, **His own people** felt that **He** was **out of His mind**, and sought to take Him away. Doubtless they were embarrassed by the zeal of this religious fanatic in the family.

J. R. Miller comments:

They could account for His unconquerable zeal only by concluding that He was insane. We hear much of the same kind of talk in modern days when some devoted follower of Christ utterly forgets self in love for his Master. People say, "He must be insane!" They think every man is crazy whose religion kindles into any sort of unusual fervour, or who grows more earnest than the average Christian in work for the Master....

That is a good sort of insanity. It is a sad pity that it is so rare. If there were more of it there would not be so many unsaved souls dying under the very shadow of our churches; it would not be so hard to get missionaries and money to send the gospel to the dark continents; there would not be so many empty pews in our churches; so many long pauses in our prayer-meetings; so few to teach in our Sunday schools. It would be a glorious thing if all Christians were beside themselves as the Master was, or as Paul was. It is a far worse insanity which in this world never gives a thought to any other world; which, moving continually among lost men, never pities them, nor thinks of their lost condition, nor puts forth any effort to save them. It is easier to keep a cool head and a colder heart, and to give ourselves no concern about perishing souls; but we are our brothers' keepers, and no malfeasance in duty can be worse than that which pays no heed to their eternal salvation.

It is always true that a man who is on fire for God seems deranged to his contemporaries. The more like Christ we are, the more we too will experience the sorrow of being misunderstood by relatives and friends. If we set out to make a fortune, men will cheer us. If we are fanatics for Jesus Christ, they will jeer us.

3:22 The scribes did not think He was insane. They accused Him of casting out demons by the power of **Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons**. The name **Beelzebub** means "lord of dung flies" or "lord of filth." This was a serious, vile, and blasphemous charge!

3:23 First Jesus refuted it, then pronounced the doom of those who made it. If He were casting out demons by Beelzebub, then Satan would be working against himself, frustrating his own purposes. His aim is to control men through demons, not to free them from demons.

3:24–26 A kingdom, a house, or a person **divided against** himself cannot endure. Continued survival depends upon internal cooperation, not antagonism.

3:27 The scribes' accusation was therefore preposterous. In fact, the Lord Jesus was doing the very opposite of what they said. His miracles signified the downfall of Satan rather than his prowess. That is what the Savior meant when He said, "**No one can enter a strong man's house, and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. And then he will plunder his house.**"

Satan is the **strong man**. The **house** is his dominion; he is the god of this age. **His goods** are the people over whom he holds sway. Jesus is the One who binds Satan and plunders **his house**. At Christ's Second Advent, Satan will be bound and cast into the bottomless pit for one thousand years. The Savior's casting out of demons during His ministry on earth was a forecast of His eventual complete binding of the devil.

3:28–30 In verses 28–30, the Lord pronounced the doom of the scribes who were guilty of the unpardonable sin. In accusing Jesus of casting out demons by demonic power, when it was actually by the power of the Holy Spirit that He did it, they in effect called the Holy Spirit a demon. This is blasphemy **against the Holy Spirit**. All kinds of sin can **be forgiven**, but this particular sin has no forgiveness. It is an **eternal** sin.

Can people commit this sin today? Probably not. It was a sin committed when Jesus was on earth performing miracles. Since He is not physically on earth today, casting out demons, the same possibility of blaspheming the Holy Spirit does not exist. People who worry that they have committed the unpardonable sin have not done so. The very fact that they are concerned indicates that they are not guilty of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

C. The Servant's True Mother and Brothers (3:31–35)

Mary, the **mother** of Jesus, came with **His brothers** to talk with Him. The crowd prevented their getting to Him, so they sent word that they were waiting **outside** for Him. When the messenger told Him that His **mother** and His **brothers** wanted Him, **He looked around** and announced that His **mother** and **brother** was **whoever does the will of God**.

Several lessons emerge from this for us:

1. First of all, the words of the Lord Jesus were a rebuke to mariolatry (the worship of Mary). He did not dishonor her as His natural mother, but He did say that spiritual relationships take precedence over natural ones. It was more to Mary's credit to do the will of God than to be His mother.
2. Secondly, it disproves the dogma that Mary was a perpetual virgin. Jesus had brothers. He was Mary's firstborn, but other sons and daughters were born to her afterward (see Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3; John 2:12; 7:3, 5, 10; Acts 1:14; 1 Cor. 9:5; Gal. 1:19. See also Psalm 69:8).
3. Jesus put God's interests above natural ties. To His followers, He still says today: "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26).
4. The passage reminds us that believers are bound by stronger cords to fellow-Christians than they are to blood-relations when those relatives are unsaved.
5. Finally, it emphasizes the importance Jesus places on doing the will of God. Do I meet the standard? Am I His mother or brother?

D. The Parable of the Sower (4:1–20)

4:1, 2 Again Jesus **began to teach by the sea**. Again the crowd made it necessary for Him to use **a boat** as His pulpit, just a short way from the beach. And again **He taught** spiritual lessons from the world of nature about Him. He could see spiritual truth in the natural realm. It is there for all of us to see.

4:3, 4 This parable has to do with the **sower**, the **seed**, and the soil. The **wayside** soil was too hard for the seed to penetrate. **Birds ... came and** ate the seed.

4:5, 6 The **stony ground** had a thin layer of dirt covering a bed of rock. Shallowness of earth prevented the seed from taking deep root.

4:7 The thorny ground had thorn bushes that cut the seed off from nourishment and sunlight, thus choking it.

4:8, 9 The **good ground** was deep and fertile with conditions favorable to the seed. **Some** seeds produced **thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred**.¹

¹ William MacDonald, [*Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*](#), ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1328–1329.