



## THE FAMILY OF GOD RECREATED

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 Mark 3:7-35  
 Tenth Message  
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Have you ever wondered why Jesus, a prophet with a message of love, provoked such controversy and opposition while he was on earth? What was so threatening about what he had to say? It was this: Jesus' message was the radical reordering, restructuring, or, to put it even more strongly, recreation of all that was sacred in Israel. The family unit and national identity are two of the most sacred institutions in Israel, and it is these two institutions that Jesus restructures in our text today. It's one thing to teach ethics, but quite another to restructure a nation. One is a lecture, the other a revolution.

In Mark's gospel we pick up our studies once more in the five stories of the controversy between Jesus and the religious rulers of Israel. Early in chapter 3, it is obvious that tensions were escalating all around Jesus. It was time for him to withdraw to the sea for seclusion and safety. Mark 3:7-12:

**And Jesus withdrew to the sea with His disciples; and a great multitude from Galilee followed; and also from Judea, and from Jerusalem, and from Idumea, and beyond the Jordan, and the vicinity of Tyre and Sidon, a great multitude heard of all that He was doing and came to Him. And He told His disciples that a boat should stand ready for Him because of the multitude, in order that they might not crowd Him; for He had healed many, with the result that all those who had afflictions pressed about Him in order to touch Him. And whenever the unclean spirits beheld Him, they would fall down before Him and cry out, saying, "You are the Son of God!" And He earnestly warned them not to make Him known.**

By this time, Jesus' reputation has spread even to distant regions. So great was his impact, seekers were coming to him not just from Galilee, but Judea and even Jerusalem; and not just from within Israel, but the area beyond the Jordan, even those pagan ports of call, Tyre and Sidon. Every geographical name listed by Mark, with the exception of Idumea, previews where Jesus will visit in the future (7:24, 31; 10:1; 11:11).<sup>1</sup> Could this be the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy concerning God's Servant, "The coastlands wait expectantly for His law" (Isa 42:4)?

Is Mark recording a dramatic shift in the life of Israel, from pilgrims pouring into Zion seeking God, to pilgrims streaming to Jesus for his divine touch? Perhaps. The crowds press in around him with the same force as

they once surrounded the Temple. But never, even during the most glorious of feast days in Jerusalem, were rampant evil and widespread sickness so subdued and silenced as they were now, under the feet of the King. Observing the size and force of the multitude, Jesus presses upon his disciples the urgency of an escape route by way of the sea. He asks that a boat stand ready for him so that he might not be constricted by the crowd. What follows is a whole new creation.

### **A. Jesus creates the new family (the new Israel) on the Mountain (3:13-19)**

**And He went up to the mountain and summoned those whom He Himself wanted, and they came to Him. And He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him, and that He might send them out to preach, and to have authority to cast out the demons. And He appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom He gave the name Peter), and James, the son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James (to them He gave the name Boanerges, which means, "Sons of Thunder"); and Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Zealot; and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him.**

Departing the crowd by way of the sea, Jesus goes up to the mountain (symbolic of where heaven and earth meet) and there appoints twelve apostles. The significance of this event cannot be overstated. It is as if the new Exodus has arrived, predicted by Isaiah, with the new Moses, who goes through the sea, up to the mountain and recreates Israel in naming the twelve new patriarchs. And Jesus does this with absolute sovereignty, summoning "those whom He Himself wanted." Israel hadn't had twelve tribes since the Assyrian captivity, in 722 B.C. Restoring the nation was to be the role of God's future Servant, "To raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel" (Isa 49:6). Tom Wright says, "The call of the twelve makes it clear enough; ...his motley group of followers either constitute the real Israel, or they are nothing."<sup>2</sup>

At first glance, however, these twelve do not look any more promising than the sons of Jacob. The impetuous Peter is their leader and spokesman. There are irreconcilable political passions between Simon the Zealot and Matthew the tax collector. And, just as king David had his sons of Zeruiah, who lived by the motto, "You want it done? Just give me a gun!" so Jesus has his Sons of Thunder, James and John, who are more than willing to

call down fire and brimstone on the enemies of the King. And, of course, the betrayer was in their midst. There's not a lot of promise in this bunch—except for one thing. Jesus summons the twelve to be *with him*, and he sends them out with *his authority*, not theirs, to preach and cast out demons. What a bold move Jesus makes, recreating the nation of Israel around himself!

The rest of the text describes the reaction which Jesus receives, from his own family and from the scribes, to his recreation of the family of God.

#### **B. At home: the family's charge against Jesus (3:20-21)**

**And He came home, and the multitude gathered again, to such an extent that they could not even eat a meal. And when His own people heard of this, they went out to take custody of Him; for they were saying, "He has lost His senses."**

When Jesus returns home to Capernaum, the crowds are so large there is neither time nor place to eat; so his ministry of teaching, healing, and cleansing wounded people goes on unabated. Upon hearing that matters are getting out of control, his own family comes to the opinion that he is out of his mind. They arrive to seize him and put him back into his proper place in the family.

But they are not the only ones who have concerns about what Jesus is doing.

#### **C. The Scribes' charge against Jesus: His alleged relationship to Satan (3:22)**

**And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons."**

The scribes come from Jerusalem to judge for themselves. They can't deny the impact Jesus is making, nor can they disclaim the fact that many who were demon possessed had been liberated. They can't deny the power, but they disclaim the source. They charge, "He is possessed by Beelzebul, casting out demons by the ruler of demons." They are claiming Jesus is in league with the devil—in effect, that Beelzebul is the source of his power.

Jesus is quick to answer their allegation with a parable of his own; and then he makes his allegations about who is in league with the devil.

#### **X. Jesus' parable to explain his relationship to Satan (3:23-27)**

**And He called them to Himself and began speaking to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? And if a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but he is finished!"**

Here we come to the center-piece of our text. Jesus

poses four rhetorical questions to his accusers, each of which points to the utter impossibility of their allegations. How can Satan cast out Satan? he demands. How absurd! A kingdom or house divided against itself it cannot stand. If Satan had risen up against himself, isn't it obvious that he was finished?

Certainly Satan was finished, but for an entirely different reason. Verse 27:

**"But no one can enter the strong man's house and plunder his property unless he first binds the strong man, and then he will plunder his house."**

Someone stronger than the strong man has bound Satan. That is why his goods are plundered.

This imagery is an explicit reference to the prophecy of Isaiah 49:24-25. (In fact, all of Mark 3 can be seen as a parallel to Isaiah 49).

**"Can booty be taken away from the *strong man*,  
Or can the innocent captive be rescued?"**

**But, thus says the Lord,**

**"Even the captive of the *strong man* shall be taken away,**

**And *the booty* of the tyrant shall be rescued.**

**I myself will contend with those who contend with you.**

**I myself will save your children."**

Isaiah was addressing the sons of Israel, who were being held in captivity, exiled under the hand of a strong enemy. How could they ever be rescued? It would take someone stronger than their powerful enemy to restore the booty of the tyrant. In this text, God says he will do it himself: "I myself will save your children." Here Jesus applies the text to himself, saying that now the sons of Israel are captive to a tyrant, the devil, and that he has in fact "bound"<sup>3</sup> this strong man, liberating the captives. This is the powerful implication of Jesus' casting out of the demons. The real threat to the family of God has been bound, and the children are free at last. This is why it is ridiculous for people to pray that Satan be "bound." That has already happened.

Next, Jesus puts his accusers on the stand, making a serious allegation of his own.

#### **C'. Charge against the scribes: Their relationship to Satan (3:28-30)**

**"Truly I say to you, all sins shall be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin"—because they were saying, "He has an unclean spirit."**

Blasphemy is a very serious sin. The name of God is to be honored and protected at all costs. In the Old Testament, this sin was held to be so serious it was considered a capital offense. But, says Jesus, blasphemy and all other sins can be forgiven...but, "whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but

is guilty of an eternal sin.”

Far from being in league with the devil, Jesus is claiming to be the bearer of the Holy Spirit, whose power liberates men and women from the power of the devil, as evidenced by his ability to cast out demons. In the face of that clear evidence the scribes were attributing the life-saving work of the Holy Spirit to the devil; and in so doing that were refusing the gift of forgiveness, and coming dangerously close to committing that sin.<sup>4</sup> For someone to commit this sin today he would have to be persistent in his refusal to heed the Holy Spirit's testimony about Jesus, as evidenced in the Scriptures and in the lives of people whom Jesus liberates from sin and the devil. By so doing such a one would be refusing the very gift of forgiveness itself.

Jesus has skillfully turned the tables on his accusers. Rather than being in league with the devil, he is league with the Holy Spirit, who was holding out living testimony about Jesus, which the scribes refused to heed. It was they, not Jesus, who were revealed as being in league with the devil. Jesus was never one to avoid controversy!

The tension thickens as Jesus' mother and brothers arrive.

#### **B'. Family sends for him but remains outside (3:31-32)**

**And His mother and His brothers arrived, and standing outside they sent word to Him, and called Him. And a multitude was sitting around Him, and they said to Him, “Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are outside looking for You.”**

Feeling that matters have gotten entirely out of hand, Jesus' mother and brothers now arrive on the scene. Notice how careful Mark is to say that they stand “outside.” This is symbolic of the fact that Jesus' own family stands outside the new family of God. Refusing to enter in, they “send” for him (the same verb used of his “sending” the twelve). This act of sending and calling is indicative that they wanted their son and brother to return to his “rightful” place within the old family structure. The question is, will Jesus condescend to family pressure?

#### **A'. Jesus redefines the new family of God (3:33-35)**

**And answering them, He said, “Who are My mother and My brothers?” And looking about on those who were sitting around Him, He said, “Behold, My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother.”**

Upon learning that his mother and brothers are outside looking for him, Jesus puts this question to the crowd: “Who are My mother and My brothers?” Then, gazing at the crowd who had crammed into the home to center their lives around him, he says, “Behold, My mother and My brothers!” In one radical statement (especially in that culture) Jesus has redefined the family of God!

Jesus is saying that this reordering of Israel and the family around himself takes precedence over both old family and national structures; and that the bonds created by his Spirit will be stronger than blood. Do you know how radical this is? The Jews of Jesus' day certainly did.

It is no different today. Rabbi Jacob Neusner, one of the most prolific writers of Judaism in our day, recognized how radical this is. In a recent book entitled *A Rabbi Talks With Jesus*, he writes,

What troubles me deeply, therefore, is that if I follow Jesus, I abandon my home and family, but the Torah has conferred upon me sacred duties to home and family-and community too...Can I accommodate myself to his claim to identify a new family, a family formed in response to the fatherhood of God and discipleship to Jesus?...Jesus makes a demand that only God makes...Jesus' link of family to master-disciple-circle forms only the first step, leading...to honor of the master like, or as much as, honor of God...This Israel here is not family and village...This “Israel” is then something other than, different from, that Israel of home and family that I know. And my argument consists in only one “but”...“But, sir, the Israel of home and family is where I am.”<sup>5</sup>

### **Implications for the family of God**

This is good news to those of you who come from families that may have quenched your spirit, or did not value you, or may have controlled or even abused you. Jesus has recreated a new family, one that is large and all embracing: It is the new nation.

There are three implications of belonging to this new family.

#### **A. A family that is free from emotional control**

The first implication is freedom. Our text says that Christ has created this new family by overcoming the evil one, binding him, and breaking his bonds over us; and now we relate to Christ. There are no hierarchies in this family. Every member is a brother or sister whose bonds are stronger than blood. And no one in this family can exercise emotional control over you. Old family structures are broken. This doesn't mean we no longer honor our mother and father. Jesus honored his mother even to his last hour, by caring for her in his death. But she was never permitted to direct his ministry, although she tried.

#### **B. A family nurtured by the apostles**

Second, everyone in this family is to be nurtured on the teaching of the apostles. They are the ones who are divinely appointed to mediate the life of Christ to us. They are the primary authority for all that we are and all that we do. They are the foundation stones of the church. Once that foundation was laid (with the gift of the New Testament) every generation was to feed on them directly. They are never to be set aside or pre-

empted by later teachers or so called prophets.

### C. A family where we are valued

And third, in this family each one is to be uniquely valued. Each one is given a unique gift(s) through his Spirit. And that gift has nothing to do with personality, upbringing, or family background. It is a pure gift of grace, which allows each individual to make a unique contribution within the new family (see 1 Corinthians 12; Romans 12; Ephesians 4). Just as Christ broke into the disciples' lives and named them apostles, so we too are gifted.

What a wonderful family to belong to, one in which we are free, we are nurtured and we are valued! But we must be careful to heed the warning in our text, for there is a real threat to this new family.

### D. The threat to the family

What was the threat to this new family? Ironically it was the old family, which was morally upright, and in which the different roles had clear definition, within strict family lines. The old family was neat and clean, but it lacked transcendence. Jesus' family was so familiar with him they could not identify the Spirit resting on him. Thus they attempted to restrain this new creation and put Jesus back in his proper place.

If it was difficult for Jesus' family to identify the Spirit resting on him, do you think as parents you are best equipped to identify your children's spiritual gifts? We have to be very careful not to quench the Spirit in our children's lives. If we coerce them into our own molds and narrow dreams of family identity, Jesus says, be careful. Though we may be well intentioned, we may be in league with the devil, quenching the Holy Spirit in their lives.

The physical family is still very important in the kingdom of God, especially in this day when family structures are disintegrating, causing irreparable damage to children. But the point of our text is that a healthy family sees itself as a temporary nurturing place. In such a family children are prepared to help them launch out into the full freedom of adult life, taking their place within the larger body of Christ. And it is in that larger context that full maturity, service and discipleship occur.

When our high schoolers went to Mexicali a couple of weeks ago, every gift of the Spirit was manifest in and through them—preachers, encouragers, prayer warriors, servers, teachers, evangelists, bearers of mercy. The testimony of every student who goes on this outreach trip to Mexico is that it is in that larger context of an-

other country that they begin to discover their spiritual gifts, their value to the body of Christ, and the love of God. Returning home for them is a difficult transition, as it was for Jesus, but at least they got a taste of the new family, this new nation whose embrace is as big as the world.

*For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man; so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God (Eph 3:14-19).*

May God grant us the grace to fully enter into this new family. Amen.

### Literary Outline

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C. **Charge** by the scribes against Jesus—His alleged relationship to **Satan** (3:22)

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B'. **Family sends** for him but remains *outside* (3:31-32)

A'. Jesus redefines the **new family** of God (3:33-35)

1. Stephen Smith makes this point in his book, *A Lion With Wings: A Narrative-Critical Approach to Mark's Gospel* (Sheffield Academic Press, 1996) 157.

2. N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996) 444.

3. *binds*: this is the same word found in Revelation 20:2 to describe Satan being "bound" for 1000 years.

4. Notice this is not a one time action, for the verb is imperfect, "they were saying he has an evil spirit," implying habitual action.

5. Jacob Neusner, *A Rabbi talks with Jesus: an Intermillennial, Interfaith exchange* (New York: Image Books, 1994) 44-57.

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