

2 Corinthians 4:13-15

Mark 3 20-35

Having chosen his twelve, Jesus resumes his ministry in Galilee, and he finds both popularity and opposition.

He is so popular that people crowd him in such a way that Jesus and his disciples are not able to "eat bread," that is, to eat anything.

At the same time opposition intensifies with accusations of demon possession from the Jerusalem authorities.

His popularity alarms his family and friends.

[Mark 3:20-21](#) "those who are close to him" (NRSV says "his family") heard about how the crowds were hindering his own self-care and they concluded that he was "out of his mind" or "he is beside himself" (literally, "he is not himself").

At the end of our text in [Mark 3:31-35](#), Jesus family, that is his ("mother and brothers") arrive.

Some believed that Jesus was out of control.

His popularity was too much.

They felt that they needed to extract Jesus from the situation. Perhaps Jesus family shows up to take him home and end the circus.

But they cannot get to him because of the crowds.

They misread what Jesus is doing.

They fail to see the prophetic mantle Jesus assumed at his baptism. That is to herald the kingdom of God and gather a new community in which God will reign.

Jesus has just assembled his twelve and he has started the process to disciple them. The crowds are overwhelming, but the mission is paramount.

The family does not see the momentous moment in which Jesus is engaged. This is the context in which we hear Jesus' question, "Who are my mother and brothers?" (3:33).

Jesus raises questions of priorities and relationships.

In answer, Jesus looks at those seated around him--perhaps the twelve, yet perhaps including more as "sisters" are included and he says:

"Here are my mother and sister and brother."

Something has shifted.

We need not think that he is rejecting his physical mother and brothers. Instead, he acknowledges that there is something more important than blood lines in the kingdom of God.

The community of disciples dedicated to do the will of God is more important; it is his "New" family--mother, brothers and sisters.

The kingdom of God establishes a new "blood" line for disciples; it is a new community.

Between these bookends regarding Jesus' ministry lies an important bookmark that we should think about.

Jesus is accused of demon possession. It is the Teachers of the law from Jerusalem that

make the accusation.

Jesus has attracted crowds from Judea and Jerusalem ([Mark 3:8](#)) and this has apparently raised concerns among the leaders in Jerusalem. They were worried that this man Jesus would usurp their power and influence.

It seems likely that the Sanhedrin, the ruling Jewish Council in Jerusalem, sent an investigative committee to Galilee to confront Jesus.

The accusation is radical. Jesus has been exorcizing demons; He has been demonstrating authority over the demons and he intends to give that same authority to the Twelve.

If the Jerusalem leaders are going to oppose Jesus, they must be able to explain this ability of his to cast out demons.

They accuse Jesus of casing out demons by the power of Beelzebul the ruler of the demons.

Jesus, they proclaim, is associated with Baal the very idolatry that led to the exile of both Israel and Judah.

In the minds of the Jerusalem investigators, Jesus is practicing Satanic magic.

This belief of Jesus satanic activities, lived on within the Jewish community for centuries after our Lord's Crucifixion and was part of the pagan anti-Christian persecution.

In fact, The Babylonian Talmud states the following:

"Yeshu of Nazareth was hanged on the day of preparation for the Passover because he practiced sorcery and led the people astray".

The accusation by the Jerusalem Investigators, then, assumes Jesus is an idolater, sorcerer, and demon possessed. The pagan response to Christianity states that Jesus learned his magic while he was in Egypt.

It seems likely that this text in Mark is within the Gospel narratives as a response to such accusations.

Jesus responds in two ways. First, he answers the accusation (3:23-27). Second, he warns his accusers (3:28-29). Jesus retorts "How can Satan drive out Satan?"

Jesus identifies Beelzebul with Satan, humanity's chief accuser whose aim is to stop us enjoying a true relationship with God.

If Jesus works for the kingdom of Satan, then Satan's strategy is misguided.

Who divides their own kingdom? Who divides their own house? If Jesus is working for Satan, then Satan's strategy is self-defeating.

However, the accusers are right on one count, Jesus says. The end has come upon Satan, but not for the reasons they think.

Jesus, while agreeing that Satan's end has come, explains the "how" differently.

What is transpiring is that the kingdom of God is breaking into the kingdom of Satan; The reign of God is defeating and has defeated the reign of Satan. Jesus has come to bind Satan so that he might despoil Satan's house. The strong man is going down and the reign of God is taking over.

Just as Jesus' family misread his ministry, so had the Jerusalem leaders. Jesus gives the leaders a warning.

Jesus prefaces his warning with his own self-affirming "Amen!" Jesus is saying heed this

warning: God forgives all sorts of sins and blasphemies against humanity, but he does not forgive the eternal sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

Before assessing the meaning of this warning, several items are notable.

First, Jesus identifies his work in the casting out of demons as the work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus speaks and acts against demons by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Second, "unforgivable sin" is not a new idea within Judaism. Blaspheming the name of God was regarded as unforgivable by the Jewish Nation. However, it seems clear that Jesus specifically identifies blasphemy with the leader's accusation. When they say that the words and works of Jesus are the words and works of Satan.

Instead of confessing Jesus as the "Son of God" as the Father announced, and the demons confirmed within the gospel up to this point, the leaders accuse Jesus to be a son of Satan. This is blasphemy. At one level Jesus may be saying, "You leaders believe in unforgivable sins.

If any sin is unforgivable, it is the one which you have just committed!"

In this sense, perhaps Jesus is not actually saying there is an unforgivable sin as much as he is turning the tables on his accusers.

A lot of people get hung up on this and imagine that they have done something in the past that is unforgivable. So, just for a moment or two, let's just think about this.

If Jesus actually does say that there is an "unforgivable sin", the sin that arises to this level is a firm and settled rejection of Jesus.

It is not some inadvertent remark about the Spirit, or one's unbelief at some point in your life, or a wilful sin in their past.

Rather, it is a persistent rejection of Jesus as the herald of the kingdom of God. It is to identify the work of the kingdom of God with the work of Satan.

Jesus' language focuses on the present act of rejection, whoever blasphemes commits an eternal sin.

As long as anyone continues in that rejection, their condemnation continues.

Crucially, if it stops, we infer that by acknowledging Jesus as the true Son of God and asking forgiveness, we are free from sin.

Dr. R.C. Sproul says the unforgivable sin is blaspheming against the Holy Spirit by calling Jesus a devil after being enlightened by that same Spirit.

According to John Calvin, we commit such sacrilege "only when we knowingly endeavour to extinguish the Spirit." There can be no salvation if the work of the Spirit is knowingly rejected. This act as described by the writer of Hebrews, reveals a heart so hard that repentance is impossible (Heb. 3:7-19).

Ultimately, as Augustine says, "It is un-repentance that is a blasphemy against the Spirit" Those who do the unforgivable act are so calloused that they do not care about their spiritual state.

And therefore, will never be troubled by the possibility that they have gone too far in their wickedness.

The Great Theologian Matthew Henry comments, "Those who fear they have committed this sin, give a good sign that they have not." (Psychopath)

Pastors both past and present agree that a person who worries that they have committed the unforgivable sin have not really done so.

The heart that blasphemes the Holy Spirit is the heart that does not worry about whether they have done so or not; they have rejected Jesus.

Jesus gathers a new community a new family of "brothers and sisters." As the kingdom of God progresses, the kingdom of Satan comes to its end.

May you be open to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. Yield to our Lord's will. And may we truly say, "O Father may thy kingdom come, and thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven."

Amen.