

Mark 3:20–35 — Welcome To the Family

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Family is important. I deeply love my family, like you love yours. I love my wife, my children and my father. I pray for them and can't wait to be with them when I am away. Does anybody else feel families are wonderful gifts from God? If you love family, I have good news for you this morning. Today we are going to learn about a new and different family we are a part of that gives us an amazing amount of joy and lasts forever. It is the family of God.

Last week, when we finished our study in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus was ministering to huge crowds of people that were all trying to touch him. Ten thousand, 15,000, even 20,000 people were all trying to hear Jesus and touch him. Everyone who touched Jesus was instantly and completely healed by Jesus. We need to remember that this was a time in world history without medical care. Many people were physically suffering. Instant and complete healing was incredibly appealing. Mark told us Jesus was in danger of being physically crushed by the crowds. This is why he occasionally taught from a boat. It was to keep the crowds away. To lessen the demands of the crowds, and to continue the work when he was gone, Jesus hand-picked 12 of his disciples and named them apostles. For the next two and a half chapters, Jesus will be spending time with his disciples training them. He will send them out in Mark 6 to carry some of the ministry load.

This morning, we see the crowds died down and the tension lessened in the city, so Jesus returned to Capernaum. Let's see what happened.

Then he went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, “He is out of his mind.” And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, “He is possessed by Beelzebul,” and “by the prince of demons he casts out the demons.” And he called them to him and said to them in parables, “How can Satan cast out Satan? 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 is coming to an end. But no one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house. “Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin”— for they were saying, “He has an unclean spirit.” And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you.” And he answered them, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.” Mark 3:20–35 (ESV)

Before we jump into the text, let me cover a few big-picture issues in Mark that we need to understand to study this text.

This begins the second part of Jesus’ ministry in Galilee where intensity of everything goes up. Scholars tell us that after Jesus selected his apostles, that closed the first part of his ministry in Galilee. The passage we read began the second part of Jesus’ ministry in Galilee. Why do Bible scholars make this division? From this point forward, while Jesus essentially did nothing differently, but the intensity of what he did was taken up a notch.

For example, in the first part of Jesus’ Galilean ministry Jesus cast demons out of people. In this second part of his Galilean ministry, Jesus cast not just one but multiple demons out of one person. One demon-possessed person was possessed by a legion of demons that Jesus cast out of him. A legion was the number of soldiers in a Roman legion. That was 5,000 soldiers. I don’t care if

you want to take that literally or metaphorically. That guy was majorly demon-possessed. Jesus took it up a notch and cast all those demons out of him at once. Another example of things being taken up a notch was Jesus' healing of the sick. In the first part of Jesus' Galilean ministry, he healed sick people. In this second part, Jesus instantly calmed a raging storm producing complete weather tranquility. He took everything about the first part of his Galilean ministry and then took it up a notch.

Mark communicated using literary sandwiches. Beginning with this event, Mark combined two stories to create one message about Jesus. He did this a number of times. It is a literary technique called intercalation. I simply call it the sandwich. Jesus will start telling one story, then Mark will break it to tell a different story. Next he will return and finish the first story. Mark combined two stories to make one big point. If you don't realize this is his purpose, you will miss what the Gospel of Mark is teaching us about Jesus.

Since this is a different style of literature, let me give you the big idea of this story up front so we can see how it develops.

The big point Mark was making is *what matters in life is not your religious background or your biological family. What matters is, are you sitting at the feet of Jesus and doing God's will? That makes you part of God's family.* Let's see how Mark makes this point by putting two stories together.

Jesus' family thought he was crazy.

Then he went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, "He is out of his mind." Mark 3:20–21 (ESV)

Jesus returned from the shore of the Sea of Galilee to Capernaum. Mark said us Jesus went home. What home is this? From our earlier studies in Mark, we learned about this home. Jesus usually stayed at Peter and Andrew's house. In the fall, when we were studying the the first part of the Gospel of Mark, we learned Peter was successful in the fishing business. He had a large house. We looked at pictures of Peter's house from archaeological excavations. His house had a large courtyard and multiple buildings on his property. It had three kitchens and a wall around it. It was a large compound by the standards of the day. This was also the house where Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law. It was most likely the house where the friends of the paralytic tore a hole in the roof to drop the paralytic in front of Jesus. Jesus now returned to Peter's house and the crowds were gathering. They were packing in to hear Jesus. Peter was getting nervous that he may need to do more roof repair.

Mark told us so many people were gathered around Jesus that he and his apostles couldn't even eat. There was no time for breakfast, lunch, or dinner. You would think that when Jesus called lunch break, people would leave. They didn't. People kept pressing into Jesus. They were demanding.

If you have a busy job but you still have time for three square meals, your job is not as demanding as the demand of the crowds on Jesus.

When Jesus' family heard of this, they went out to seize him.

Who were Jesus' family? We will read about them in Mark 6:3. They include Mary, Jesus' mother. Jesus also had four half-brothers, James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon. Jesus also had at least two half-sisters, although we don't

know their names. The omission of Joseph in Mark 6:3 implies Joseph was probably deceased.

John 2:11 tells us the first miracle Jesus performed was turning water to wine. That means when Jesus grew up, he wasn't performing miracles. He kept his powers hidden. As far as his half-siblings were concerned, Jesus was just the annoying older brother that was the perfect child who never did anything wrong. Now they hear things about their older half-brother that they never expected. They hear stories of him casting out demons and healing the sick. If that wasn't strange enough, they hear stories of him claiming to forgive sins and be the one who created the Sabbath day.

They don't know where the broth they sat with at the breakfast table is getting these ludicrous ideas. As Mark wrote, they thought Jesus lost his marbles. They thought he had gone insane. In addition, they heard of Jesus taking on the religious establishment. Nobody in his right mind would drive the money changers out of the temple. That would put Jesus on a collision path with the most powerful religious leaders of his day. They were sure he had lost it and was crazy.

As it says in John 7:5:

For not even his brothers believed in him. John 7:5 (ESV)

This is why they traveled the 30 miles from Nazareth to Capernaum to seize him. The Greek term for seize means to take someone by force. It was used to describe the arrest of John the Baptist. Their plans were to arrest Jesus and put him in the Nazareth insane asylum where they could dope him up on

meds so he could be watched by the men in white coats. That was their plan for Jesus, their insane brother.

Jesus had not done any of his miracles in Nazareth so they had no firsthand evidence of his power. Later, when Jesus went to Nazareth, he gave the Sabbath sermon. The people were so closed to his identity they tried to throw him off a cliff to kill him. Jesus didn't do any miracles in Nazareth. Jesus was never accepted in his hometown and by his brothers in his lifetime.

Just so you know, the Bible tells us that Jesus' brothers did eventually believe in him. They didn't believe in him when he was alive, even after his miracles, but after he died and rose from the dead, they changed their tune. Jesus' half-brothers were forced to believe he was the Son of God because they saw him die and they talked with him after he rose from the dead.

The resurrection is possibly the only thing that could convince people to start worshipping their own brother, praying to their own brother, and calling their own brother God in the flesh.

When we look at the disciples gathered after Jesus' ascension back to the Father before the coming of the Holy Spirit, the brothers were part of the group that worshipped Jesus.

All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers. Acts 1:14 (ESV)

Later in church history, we see Jesus' half-brothers as some of the leaders in the early church.

Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? 1 Corinthians 9:5 (ESV)

James, the half-brother of Jesus, became the leader of the church in Jerusalem and is mentioned multiple times in Scripture. In addition, James wrote one of the books in our Bible — the book of James.

Judas, another half-brother of Jesus, also played an important role in the early church. He also wrote a book in our Bible called the book of Jude.

Jesus' family would eventually come full circle and believe he is God and worship him, but until Jesus rose from the dead, they thought Jesus was insane and needed a mental hospital. That is why they came to take him away by force to the men in the white coats.

Mark stopped the story of Jesus' family at this point and inserted his second story about Jesus and the religious leaders.

The religious leaders thought Jesus was demon-possessed.

And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "by the prince of demons he casts out the demons." Mark 3:22 (ESV)

In John's Gospel, we know Jesus visited Jerusalem before his Galilean ministry. While there, he healed the sick and cleansed the temple. That put him on the radar of the religious leaders. Now, the religious leaders in Jerusalem heard that Jesus was healing thousands of people around Galilee. Crowds numbering 10,000 or more were following Jesus. People were traveling 120-150 miles to see Jesus. The religious leaders sent a team of scribes, who were the theological guardians of Judaism, to investigate Jesus. The problem is they weren't there to investigate honestly. They had the guilty verdict written on their laptops before the investigation began. Their true motive was to conduct a smear campaign to destroy Jesus' reputation.

When Mark said the scribes came down from Jerusalem, he said they came down from Jerusalem because Jerusalem is geographically above everything. Jerusalem is 2,550 feet above sea level. Capernaum is 700 feet below sea level. That is why they went down from Jerusalem.

Similar to modern politics, the strategy of the religious leaders was to have the scribes use their respected position to undermine Jesus and destroy his reputation. The scribes' conclusion about Jesus was that he casts out demons using the power of Beelzebul, the prince of demons. Essentially they decided to claim Jesus was demon-possessed. He wasn't possessed by just any demon but by Satan himself. They hoped to ruin Jesus' public reputation more effectively than charging him with Russian collusion.

There is some interesting history on the name Beelzebul. Originally, it was Beelzebub, not Beelzebul. The "b" on the end was changed to an "l." In the Old Testament, Baal was the name of the chief Canaanite god. Beelzebub meant Baal the prince of the gods.

In the Old Testament, the Jews had developed a way of mocking their Canaanite, demon-worshipping neighbors. They changed the final "b" sound to an "l" sound, changing Beelzebub to Beelzebul. That completely changes the meaning of the word. Instead of meaning Baal the prince of the gods, it means the prince of the poop, the one in charge of the big steaming dog pile. That was a memorable way of mocking their Canaanite, demon-worshipping neighbors. Over time, Beelzebul became a nickname for Satan himself.

The smear campaign by the religious leaders against Jesus wasn't just claiming Jesus' miracles were powered by Satan but it also involved a mocking nickname that memorably insulted Jesus and every miracle he had done. Harsh words like that sting, and unfortunately, they are memorable.

As I studied, I found myself wondering, what led these religious leaders to be so close-minded to Jesus? How could they say such harsh and hateful things about Jesus after all the healing of sickness and casting out of demons?

While Mark doesn't tell us these details, when Matthew recorded this same incident, he told us something happened just before the scribes launched their smear campaign that put them over the edge.

Then a demon-oppressed man who was blind and mute was brought to him, and he healed him, so that the man spoke and saw. And all the people were amazed, and said, "Can this be the Son of David?" Matthew 12:22–23 (ESV)

Up to this point, Jesus was healing sick people and demon-possessed people. This time, Jesus healed a man who was blind, plus mute, plus demon-possessed. This guy had massive physical and spiritual debilitations. After Jesus performed this incredible healing, that was a step beyond any healing he had done in the past, the people began talking about Jesus being the Messiah, the Son of God.

That put the religious leaders in a panic because they were losing control. The people were seeing Jesus' true identity, so in desperation they launched their "smear Jesus" campaign that involved outlandish and evil accusations.

Jesus defended himself against these attacks. First, he showed why this was a stupid argument.

Jesus showed the absurdity of their logic.

And he called them to him and said to them in parables, “How can Satan cast out Satan? 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 is coming to an end. Mark 3:23–26 (ESV)

Jesus said, “This is stupid. Why would Satan drive out Satan?” It would make no sense for Jesus to drive out his own demons and heal the sick. Satan always tries to take life. It makes no sense for him to be restoring life. If Satan was busy fighting himself, Satan’s kingdom will be destroyed. Every kingdom that fights against itself will not last. Satan doesn’t shoot his own people.

Then Jesus tells them what is actually happening.

Jesus explained what was actually happening.

But no one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house. Mark 3:27 (ESV)

Nobody can rob a house unless he binds up the strong man in the house. The strong man is Satan. The house is the kingdom which he dominates here on earth. His possessions are the helpless victims he holds in bondage through his demons and disease. Only somebody stronger than Satan can bind Satan, walk into his house, and set his captives free. Jesus said, “That is what was happening. Satan’s kingdom is under siege. I have Satan bound. I am in his house, the kingdom of this world. I am setting his captives free by healing the sick and casting out demons.” Jesus said, “I am not powered by Satan. I am overpowering Satan. That is what is happening.”

Then Jesus moved from defending himself to going on the offensive.

Jesus warned them of the danger that came with their decision — the unforgivable sin.

“Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin”— for they were saying, “He has an unclean spirit.” Mark 3:28–30 (ESV)

Here we run across what is known as the unforgivable sin. Even people who do not go to church have heard about the unforgivable sin. What is the sin that is unforgivable? It is not murder. It is not divorce. It is not adultery. Those may feel like unforgivable sins but they are not unforgivable sins.

According to this, the only thing that won't be forgiven is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. What is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit? Let me give you a working definition. I put this definition in your outline so you don't need to write it down.

Blaspheming the Holy Spirit is after experiencing overwhelming evidence of Jesus' identity and the Holy Spirit's power, deciding to persistently reject Jesus. It is an unforgivable sin because there is no plan B when someone willfully and permanently walks away from Jesus and all God offers us through him.

Remember what was happening in this context. Thousands of people were cured of diseases. Demons were kicked out of thousands of people. People have their lives back. The scribes didn't just have healed people around them but they just watched Jesus heal a man who was demon-possessed, blind and mute. They heard Jesus teach. They knew what Jesus said about God, and he was not in theological error. These religious leaders had huge amounts of firsthand evidence for Jesus' identity. There was not much more Jesus could do to be more convincing than he has already done. Yet, they still rejected everything the

Holy Spirit had done and the truth about Jesus. They didn't just reject this but they gave Satan the credit for it.

The unforgivable sin is, after being fully exposed to the truth of Jesus, the power of God and the transforming work of the Holy Spirit, people walk away from Jesus. It is unforgivable because of you have experienced Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit and walk away;, there is no plan B.

Some people are worried they have committed the unforgivable sin. If you are worried you have committed this sin, your concern is evidence that you have not committed it.

The writer of Hebrews, writing 40 years after Mark, told us the same thing about the unforgivable sin.

...how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will. Hebrews 2:3–4 (ESV)

He said, if you turn your back on Jesus after knowing him and experiencing signs, wonders and miracles done by God, there is nothing left for you. If you turn your back on everything God offers you through Jesus and reject the works of the Holy Spirit, there is no hope.

A few chapter later, the writer of Hebrews gives an even stronger warning.

For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. Hebrews 6:4–6 (ESV)

If you have experienced the power of the Holy Spirit, tasted the goodness of the Word of God, and experienced the power of Christ, and then you reject the

whole thing and walk away, there is no hope for you. You are guilty of the unforgivable sin. There is nothing more God has to offer us other than his Son and his Holy Spirit.

The scribes were treading on this line. They were rejecting Jesus after receiving full knowledge of him, and they were rejecting the Holy Spirit after seeing the miraculous works done through him. If they stayed in that position, they committed the unforgivable sin.

The unforgivable sin is not a warning directed to those outside the church. It is a warning directed to those inside the church. It is a warning to those who know the truth and have seen the Holy Spirit change lives but then reject it and walk away. If that is what happens, there is nothing left God has to offer you.

How do we know if someone has committed this sin? In all honestly, we never know for sure if someone has committed this sin. The Christian life is filled with peaks and valleys. Sometimes, people appear to turn away from Christ for long periods of time but the persistence of the Holy Spirit brings them to repentance. The only way to know for sure if someone commits this sin for them to stay in this hardened state until death itself.

What does it look like for someone to commit this sin in real life? When I was a youth pastor, we enjoyed a super charismatic leader in the church. He helped plant the church. He led many people to Christ in the church. He was head of the elder board in the church for years. Unknown to us, his effervescent personality masked deep struggles in his marriage. He eventually had an affair with a woman at work, walked out on his wife and moved in with another woman.

He divorced his wife, leaving her alone. The elders of the church, many of whom he led to the Lord, cared deeply about him. Many times they tried to meet with him, but he refused and said, “I know everything you are going to tell me and I don’t want to hear it.” This man who was a leader in the church, never returned to any church. As far as I know, 25 years later he still wants nothing to do with Christ and his church.

It appears he committed what the Bible calls the unforgivable sin. He tasted the forgiveness of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit, then turned away from it. God has nothing left to offer other than his Son and his Holy Spirit.

This man may be in a long period of wandering from Jesus. He may have never been a genuine Christian. I don’t know. All I know is he is treading on the line of the unforgivable sin after knowing Jesus and the Holy Spirit so deeply and then intentionally turning and walking away.

Jesus gives us a new family.

And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you.” And he answered them, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.” Mark 3:31–35 (ESV)

Then Mark returned to the first story. He is going to complete the sandwich. Jesus’ mother and brothers showed up outside of Peter’s house. They sent word to Jesus that his mother and brothers were there to speak with him. We know they actually came to jump him. Remember that in this culture, family was everything. For that reason, they expected Jesus to drop everything and go outside to meet them. Instead Jesus said, “Who are my mother and brothers?”

Jesus claimed his family was those around him. Whoever loves Jesus and does the will of God are the ones who are his family.

Jesus' point was the only relationship that matters is the one we have with God, by sitting at Jesus' feet and doing God's will. Biological relationships are ultimately not what are important. Religious relationships are ultimately not what is important. Whether we sitting at the feet of Jesus and obeying God's will are what is important. Sitting at Jesus' feet and obeying God's will is what ushers us into a new and better family — the family of God through Jesus.

In Luke, Jesus said something similar. He said being biologically related to him is not what is important. Being spiritually related to him is important.

As he said these things, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, "Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed!" But he said, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" Luke 11:27–28 (ESV)

The woman in the crowd raised her voice and said, "It would be great to be your mother. Those who are biologically related to you are so blessed." Jesus said that a biological relationship with him is not what matters. What matters is a spiritual relationship with him. It is being someone who sits at the feet of Jesus.

Notice sitting at the feet of Jesus is always coupled with obeying the Word of God.

Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him... 1 John 2:4 (ESV)

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." Matthew 7:21 (ESV)

We have learned a few things in this passage.

Application

1. **What matters in life is not your religious background or your biological family. What matters is sitting at the feet of Jesus and doing God's will. That makes us part of God's family.** This is a challenge to those of us who have grown up in the church, especially if you are a teenager or young adult. It doesn't matter if you grew up in a good church. It doesn't matter if you grew up in a good family. You need to decide to sit at the feet of Jesus. You need to decide to read God's Word and learn from Jesus. You need to decide to obey God's will. Nobody can rest in a biological family relationship or a religious relationship. Each of us needs to choose to be part of the family of God, to sit at the feet of Jesus and obey God's will.
2. **The unforgivable sin is permanently rejecting God's family after knowing Jesus and experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit.** The reason the unforgivable sin is unforgivable is because after you reject Jesus and the Holy Spirit, that is all God has to offer us, there is no plan B.
3. **Jesus gives us a new family.** In the first century, many of the people that heard Mark's Gospel had lost their families. They were ostracized from their biological families because they turned to Jesus. Mark pointed them to Jesus, who told them that while they may be rejected by their biological families, they were warmly welcomed into a new family called the church, with Jesus at the head. This new family is known for loving relationships that last not just for 50-70 years but they stretch into eternity. This is why the Bible tells us to call one another brothers and sisters in Christ.

As your pastor, let me just say, “Welcome to the family!” You are not alone.
Around you are your brothers and sisters through Jesus.



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