

HOW TO ROB A STRONG MAN PP1

Mark 3:20-30

Introduction: Jesus and fake news

Anyone who reads a newspaper, checks the news online, or spends time on social media has experienced the pervasive impact of “fake news”. Even if we isolate ourselves from outside sources of information, we are still influenced by fake news, in billboards we see along the streets and highways, in conversations we have with family, friends, neighbors and coworkers. It’s not that difficult to check sources, yet many simply don’t make the effort. And so we allow others to manipulate us, and often manipulate others by passing on inaccurate, misleading, incomplete, or simply false information.

Fake news may seem to be a modern phenomenon. The internet has proven to be fertile soil for spreading its poisonous vines. Yet fake news has been around as long as recorded history. The passage that we will study today shows that Jesus was the focus of attack for the fake news of his day.

Text: Mark 3:20-30 (ESV)

²⁰ Then he went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat.
²¹ And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, “He is out of his mind.”

²² 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.” ²³ And he called them to him and said to them in parables, “How can Satan cast out Satan? ²⁴ If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵ And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. ²⁶ And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end. ²⁷ 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.

²⁸ “Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, ²⁹ but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin” — ³⁰ for they were saying, “He has an unclean spirit.”

The Story, Structure and Central Idea of Mark 3:20-35:

PP2 In our passage for today Mark weaves two stories together. He takes the story of Jesus’s interaction with the Scribes (3:22-30) and places it between two parts of the story about Jesus’ interaction with his family (3:20-21; 3:31-35). Mark does this so often, that biblical scholars refer to this as a “Markian sandwich”.

PP3 This so-called Markian sandwich is clearly seen in the **structure** of the passage:

A 3:20-21. Jesus' family
 B 3:22 The Scribes' charges against Jesus
 C 3:23-29. Jesus answers the Scribes' charges
 B' 3:30 The Scribes' charges against Jesus
A' 3:31-35. Jesus' family

PP4 The structure of this text also shows that its central saying is found in Mark 3:27: "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."

Commentary: Let's look now at the text. [Read Mark 3:20-22]

20 Then he went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. 21 And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, "He is out of his mind." 22 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."

As we saw in Mark 1:29-30 and again 2:1, Jesus' "home" in Capernaum was the house of Peter, Andrew and Peter's mother-in-law. [See slide]. **PP5**

When his family heard where he was, we read that they went out to seize him, for they were saying, "He is out of his mind": Some Bibles interpret this as "it was being said", to lessen the discomfort we feel that Jesus' own family thought he might be going crazy. But the better translation is "they were saying", where *they* refers to the members of Jesus' family.

The key issue in our text is Jesus' identity and mission. His own family came to rescue him, for they thought he was losing his mind, or at least acting quite strangely. The Jewish Scribes also came to him and they had even more radical thoughts concerning Jesus' behavior. They rejected his claim to be the Messiah, the Son of God. But they could not deny the mighty miracles he performed, so they attributed them to demonic possession. Satan here is named *Beel-zebul*, meaning "Baal is exalted". In 2 Kings 1:2 Baal is called *Baalzebub*, meaning "Lord of the flies", a parody of the Canaanite god's title.

By placing verses 21 and 22 next to each other, Mark emphasizes that the two groups who should have most readily recognized and accepted Jesus were the very ones who questioned him and his mission. Jesus' own family's concerns regarding his actions will surface again in Mark 3:31-35, where Mark completes the story of Jesus' interaction with them.

Let's look now at Jesus' response to the Scribes. [Read Mark 3:22-26]

And he called them to him and said to them in parables, “How can Satan cast out Satan? ²⁴ If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵ And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. ²⁶ And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end.

Jesus often called his disciples or the crowds to come to him. Here however he issues a legal summons or subpoena to stand trial in court. The Scribes accused him, but he is their judge, both now and at the end of time. With his friends and disciples Jesus spoke openly. With the crowds and with his opponents he spoke in parables (riddles, metaphors, figures of speech, allegories). Here he is not inviting the Scribes to a debate, rather he is expressing his judgment upon them and their false accusations. “How can Satan cast out Satan?” is a rhetorical question, which assumes a negative answer. Jesus shows how absurd this claim is. The Scribes’ accusation leads logically to the ridiculous conclusion in verse 26, that Satan’s power and rule are coming to an end through a process of suicidal self-destruction.

So now we come to the central verse: [Read Mark 3:27]

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.

In verse 27 Jesus introduces another parabolic saying. The “strong man” here is Satan, and “his goods” are those individuals possessed by demons. “Binding” refers to Jesus’ power over Satan, and “plundering” describes the exorcisms he and his disciples performed. Jesus has disarmed and bound Satan, and thus can free those whom Satan and his demons have oppressed and possessed. This demonstrates both Jesus’ present and ultimate victory over Satan.

Now we come to two of the most misunderstood verses in the Bible. [Read Mark 3:28-30]

“Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, ²⁹ but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin”— ³⁰ for they were saying, “He has an unclean spirit.”

In verse 28 “the children of men” includes all humanity, while “all sins” refers to all acts of sin (not the sin principle in general). To blasphemy is to sin against God or speak falsely about Him. There could not be a more inclusive statement of forgiveness: all people will be forgiven all sins committed against all human beings, and even against God himself. Thus it is all the more surprising that verse 29 seems to contradict verse 28. This does seem unusual to us, but it would not be unusual to people in Israel in Jesus’ day. The Bible often presents a general statement followed by a more specific statement, in order to increase the impact of the second statement.

How do you commit an “eternal sin”? To be “guilty of an eternal sin” means to commit a sin which has eternal consequences. Jesus declares that whoever speaks falsely against the Holy Spirit will never receive forgiveness. But what is this sin that has eternal consequences?

PP6 There are only two viable options: First, the sin in verse 29 could refer to the consequences found at the end of the verse: that is, there will be no forgiveness because someone committed an unidentified sin which has eternal consequences. If so, then we can only speculate about what this sin actually is. The meaning of this saying becomes completely arbitrary and subjective. We have no way to determine what Jesus actually meant.

But when we read Mark 3:28-29 together, we are led to a different interpretation. On the one hand we have God’s all-inclusive offer of forgiveness. On the other hand we have a sin which cannot be forgiven. Verse 29 refers to the Scribes’ refusal to recognize and accept God’s redemptive activity. God was at work in their very presence to redeem, forgive, and reconcile the world to himself through Christ. But they refused to believe in Jesus, whose life and death made forgiveness and reconciliation a real possibility. Verse 30 confirms this interpretation and links this passage to verses 3:22-27. By claiming that Jesus’ did miracles by the power of Satan and not the Holy Spirit, the Scribes were not only rejecting Jesus, they were rejecting God’s offered forgiveness.

So we come now to three conclusions:

(1) *The first concerns the eternal or so-called “unpardonable” sin:*

What is your worst, secret, recurring sin? The one that you can’t seem to get rid of, that keeps coming back to tempt you, and often succeeds? Are you ready? Do you have it in mind? Let me assure you, that is not the unpardonable sin.

If you think that you may have committed the unpardonable sin, let me assure you, you have not. As verse 28 makes clear, all who accept Jesus’ work on their behalf will have all their sins forgiven, whether they were against God or other human beings. The only sin for which Jesus’ says there can be no forgiveness is to reject God’s offer of forgiveness in Christ. **PP7**

Jesus’ words and deeds demonstrate the divine origin of his teaching and authority and power. We can believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior of Israel and the World, and recognize the miracles he did as evidence to support this claim. Or we can reject Jesus and deny the evidence. But Jesus reminds us: every choice has its own consequences. **PP8**

(2) *Our next conclusion concerns Jesus’ power and authority over Satan*

Remember the main idea in Mark 3:27): “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.” PP9

We have barely reached the end of the third chapter of Mark’s Gospel, and Jesus has already demonstrated his power over sickness and the Sabbath, over sin and Satan. Satan is indeed a dangerous foe, but he has been defeated. It is truly diabolical then that Satan takes the very words that Jesus addressed to his opponents and turns them against Jesus’ own followers.

Satan is the master of fake news. He accuses us of being unworthy of God’s love and forgiveness. Here Satan’s fake news takes the form of a half-truth. It’s true that we don’t deserve and can’t earn God’s love and forgiveness. But it’s just as true that God considers us worth saving. As we read in Romans 5:8, “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Jesus gave his life so that we could be reconciled to God, and he considered it to be well worth the price he paid.

Brothers and Sisters: We have been reconciled to God by Jesus’ death. Now we are called to follow Jesus. And Jesus sent the same Holy Spirit who worked so powerfully in his own life and ministry to enable us to obey his call to pick up our cross daily and follow him. We are called to live with and for Jesus here and now, every day. To live with and for our fellow believers, and with and for those who have not yet experienced God’s love. We do this not in our own power, but in the power of God’s Holy Spirit. We do this not from fear of Satan or divine punishment, but out of love and gratitude towards our heavenly Father, who has shown his love for us in Christ, who accomplished our redemption. As we read in Hebrews 12:1-2:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

(3) *Our final conclusion concerns Jesus family:* [Read Mark 3:31-35] PP10

In 3:31-35 Mark brings our thoughts back to the scene of the crime, that is to Peter’s house, where his disciples and the crowds have gathered to hear him teach. Jesus is told that his family members are waiting outside and asking to see him. Instead of going to them, he looks around at those gathered around him declares, “Here are my mother and my brothers!”

What a surprising thing this is! Jesus’ family wants to seize him, that is to “take him into custody”, because he is acting so strangely. The Scribes from Jerusalem go one step further and accuse him of being possessed by Satan. In contrast to these negative reactions to Jesus and his ministry, here at last we find a positive response to Jesus. First there is the crowd who came to hear him speak. Then in the next chapter we listen

to Jesus as he gives private instruction to his disciples. Jesus looks them all in the eye, and with a smile he says to them, "You are my true spiritual family". The sermon next week will consider the implications of Jesus' words in Mark 3:35: "For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother."