

# When Good Becomes Evil

*Mark 3:20-34*

February 15, 2004

The approach of darkness can be a welcome friend. At the end of a hot summer day we often look forward to the fading light and the cool evening breeze. The approaching darkness can signal the rejuvenation of rest and sleep. Darkness can be a friend.

But darkness is also a strong reminder our limitations. In the darkness, we become disoriented. We lose our way. We stumble and fall. We break things . . . including ourselves. We become confused and disconnected. In the darkness it becomes difficult to know what's really there.

Of course there are similarities between physical darkness and spiritual darkness. As spiritual darkness overtakes us, we become disoriented. We lose our way. We stumble and fall. We become confused and disconnected. We can no longer see what is really there. Sadly all too often spiritual darkness is self-chosen and self-inflicted.

This morning we continue our series in the Gospel of Mark, *Seeing Jesus Again – for the First Time*. Jesus remains a person revered and worshipped by almost one third of the human race. But do we know him as we should? What did he say? What did he do? In the scripture passage that Brent read for us this morning, we see the rising opposition that Jesus faced as he continued his public ministry. Opposition from both the religious leaders . . . and from his own family. This passage provides two interesting phrases that are both well known, although rarely do we read them in the proper context.

This passage contains the words, “A house divided against itself cannot stand.” Many of us learned that that was a quote from President Abraham Lincoln as he faced the impending Civil War. Yes, Honest Abe did say it. But he wasn't the first to say it. When he said it, President Lincoln was quoting the words that Jesus spoke over eighteen centuries before.

That's one well-known quote. The passage also tells us that Jesus said (vss. 28, 29)

*People will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin.*

And so we wonder – what is the unpardonable sin? From time to time in my ministry I have had persons come to me, very concerned because in a moment of weakness, they committed the unpardonable sin. Perhaps they cursed God or they had been unfaithful to their spouse . . . or they had done something else for which they were deeply troubled and they wonder if maybe this has cut them off from God forever.

So, I would invite you to look with me at first the background and the context for these remarks. And then, what did Jesus actually say and then what does his words mean from you and me today.

According to Mark's Gospel, this story is set fairly early in Jesus ministry. Before we get to the scripture passage of the morning, I would ask that you would join me in a very quick tour of the first two and a half chapters of Mark. First Mark 1:14, 15:

*Jesus came announcing the good news of the kingdom of God and calling men and women to repent and to believe.*

Then (1:16ff) Jesus called the first of his disciples and told them that they would be fishers of men.

In vs. 21 ff – He demonstrated his power and authority over the demons . . . and over all diseases, including leprosy. That's just in the first chapter.



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In the second chapter, (vss. 1ff), Jesus claims the authority to forgive sins . . . and vss. 18ff, he defends his disciples because they are not fasting and because they are ignoring the Sabbath regulations.

In the first part of the third chapter (vss 1ff) he himself ignores the Sabbath regulations by healing on the Sabbath. Do you have any doubt that Jesus is becoming one very controversial person? Do you wonder why the opposition was beginning to build. Not just from the religious leaders, but even from his own family. And now we come to the scripture for the morning (vss. 19-21)

*Then he went home; and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, "He has gone out of his mind."*

Did you ever have a child who was struggling . . . really struggling. Did you ever say, "I just don't know what I'm going to do with her?" You've tried everything and nothing seems to be working. That's what Jesus' family must have felt. They just didn't know what they were going to do with him. This was not the Jesus they thought they knew. Yes, people were flocking to hear him. No doubt some heard his words and knew that this was the voice of God. Some came because they were curious . . . And some were very hostile.

Then we come to the the first of the quotes that I mentioned. What was the reason Jesus said these words? We just looked at some of what Jesus had said and done. No not everyone is happy that the sick are being healed and the demon possessed delivered. (vs. 22)

*And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, "He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons."*

The religious leaders could not deny that Jesus was doing some very spectacular things. People were being healed. Jesus was casting out demons. The oppressed were being set free. And the only argument the religious leaders could make was, "He's doing this because he's made a secret pact with the devil. This is nothing more than a ruse. Satan is allowing Jesus to cast out demons . . . but that's just so he can suck you in . . . it's really just all a huge trick. That can't be God. That just can't be God. We have God all figured out. We know what God would do and how he would do it. This just cannot be something from God."

How did Jesus respond? (vss. 23 ff):

*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 his end has come.*

Now note vs. 27 . . . why is Jesus able to heal the sick, cast out the demons and free the oppressed? What did Jesus say?

*But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered.*

Do you get that? Why is Jesus able to heal the sick, cast out the demons and free the oppressed? Because in Jesus, Satan . . . that's the strong man . . . Satan has been bound! In Jesus the powers of sin and death and evil are being defeated.

Then we come to vs. 28 and again we must be very careful to read this in the context of what we have just seen:

*Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin"—for they . . . Who? The religious leaders . . . for they had said, "He has an unclean spirit."*

Do you see it? What is the unpardonable sin? Don't raise you hand, but is there anyone here this morning wondering . . . worrying if you committed the unpardonable sin? The short

answer to such a concern is, I believe – *if you are worried about it, you haven't done it!* Does that sound too easy? Look at the passage. The people Jesus warns of crossing the line is the religious leaders of his own day.

Why? Because they chose to consistently, deliberately turn their backs on God. Slowly, brick by brick they were building a wall against the promptings of God's Holy Spirit. Eventually the wall becomes so high and so thick that they have effectively shut themselves off from God. God is still speaking. The Holy Spirit is still active, but they are so insulated and so isolated by their own arrogance and hard-heartedness that they are no longer able to hear God speak or to see God at work.

Centuries before, Isaiah had issued a similar warning to the leaders of God's people (5:20)

*Ah, you who call evil good and good evil,  
who put darkness for light and light for darkness,  
who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!*

In another time and place, Jesus issued a similar warning (Jn. 3:19)

*And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed.*

Does God ever give up on us? I don't think so. At least not while we still have breath. But some spend a lifetime running from God and hiding from God and insisting that we are in control. We are the masters of our own fate. As long as we do, we are building the walls. And for some, that walls become very high and very thick.

So what's the lesson for us today? First the words of Jesus are just as true now as they ever were. No house divided against itself can stand! That's certainly true of Satan's kingdom. But that's true in many other ways as well. No house . . . no family . . . no nation . . . no church can stand with divided goals, divided dreams and divided loyalties. Many of us try. We want to be in control whether that's our families, our churches, our relationships.

When we *all* try to be in control, the result is a disaster. 300 people cannot pilot an airplane. 200 people cannot run a church. 2 people cannot be in control of a family.

The answer to a divided house . . . the answer to a divided church . . . the answer to a divided world is just as true now as it was in Jesus day. Are we willing to have a heart that yearns for God? Are we willing to seek his will? Can we see God at work in our lives? In our midst? Can we rejoice that persons are being set free from prison? Can we praise God that persons are being set free from lust, from alcohol, from the tormented ghosts of the past?

As we do, we discover the healing, freeing, life-giving, life changing power of God!