

Introduction

1. Are you hungry?
 - a. How about a Markan sandwich?
 - b. In today's text, we encounter a literary feature that occurs several times in the Gospel of Mark.
 - c. Mark places a story within a story. A story begins (the bottom slice of bread); another story is told (the middle of the sandwich); the beginning story concludes (the top slice of bread).
 - d. Mark often sandwiches one story inside another like this to "indicate a lapse of time, heighten tension, draw attention to, contrast, and most importantly to use two accounts to interpret each other. In other words the purpose . . . is primarily theological. Other examples are 4:1-20; 5:21-43; 6:7-29; 11:12-25; 14:1-11; 14:53-72 (or 14:53-15:15; possibly 14:17-31; 15:40-16:8)" (James A. Brooks, *Mark*, 73).
 - e. Today's Markan sandwich highlights two sources of opposition to Jesus' ministry; his family (Mk 3:20-21; 31-35) and Jewish teachers of the law from Jerusalem (Mk 3:22-30).
2. Jesus was undeterred by the opposition of his family and Jewish leaders and revealed the identity of his true family.
3. **Read Mk 3:20-35.**

A. Opposition from Family: Jesus is Crazy (20-21)

1. Jesus came down from the mountain after appointing the Twelve. (20)
 - a. He entered a house and a crowd gathered as usual. It may have been the house of Simon and Andrew in Capernaum. We don't know with certainty, but the scene is familiar.
 - b. The house was so crowded with demanding people that Jesus and his disciples didn't have space or time to rest or eat.
 - c. The selfish crowd didn't care about Jesus or his true mission. They just wanted to be healed.
2. Word about Jesus and the large crowds had reached his family in Nazareth. (21)
 - a. His family may have been genuinely concerned for Jesus' health and mental stability.
 - b. From information in Mk 6:3 we know that Jesus had at least four half-brothers: "James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon" and an unknown number of half-sisters.
 - c. Like most of the crowd that came to Jesus, his family didn't fully understand who he was or what he had come to do.
 - d. His family had come to "take charge" (Gk., *kratesai* – "restrain;" "lay hold of;" "arrest" as in Mk 6:17, 12:12, 14:1) of Jesus.
 - e. They had concluded that "He is out of his mind" (Gk., *ekseste*) and most likely planned to take him back home to Nazareth by force if necessary.
 - f. Daniel Akin notes, "From His family's perspective, Jesus is a religious fanatic who is hurting the family name, and He is also a danger to Himself. He has to be stopped. . . . Oh, if they only knew what He was doing on their behalf!" (Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Mark*, 74).
3. And so the bottom slice of bread of our first Markan sandwich has been laid down. We will return to this storyline later in Mk 3:31-35.
4. Now we move to a second story, the middle of our Markan sandwich!

B. Opposition from Jewish Leaders: Jesus is Demon Possessed (22-30)

1. The teachers of the law had come down from Jerusalem. (22)
 - a. The conflict with Jewish leaders has gone beyond Galilee.
 - b. This group of teachers from Jerusalem had come to judge Jesus and to see how far this religious insurrection had progressed. Was Galilee in religious rebellion?
 - c. They concluded that "He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons" (22).
 - 1) The name Beelzebul means "master of the house."
 - 2) Another form of this name found in the OT is Beelzebub, which is a contemptuous modification Baal-Zebub (2 Kgs 1:2ff), which means "lord of the dung flies."
 - 3) This name is associated with Satan, the Devil, who is the prince or ruler of demons.

- d. The teachers attributed Jesus' healing and casting out of demons to Satan rather than to God.
- 1) They didn't deny what Jesus had done but misidentified the power/name in which he had done it.
 - 2) They repeatedly brought this charge against him: "He has an impure spirit" (30).
2. Jesus gave his analysis of their argument (23-30)
- a. He spoke directly to the Jewish leaders using parables.
 - 1) Wiersbe writes, "A parable is a story or figure placed alongside a teaching to help us understand its meaning. . . . A parable begins innocently as a *picture* that arrests our attention and arouses our interest. But as we study the picture, it becomes a *mirror* in which we suddenly see ourselves. If we continue to look by faith, the mirror becomes a *window* through which we see God and His truth. How we respond to that truth will determine what further truth God will teach us" (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Diligent*, 50).
 - 2) Parables were a primary feature of Jesus' teaching ministry as we will soon see in Mark.
 - b. Jesus began his analysis by asking them a question: "How can Satan drive out Satan?" (23)
 - 1) He shared the short Parable of the Divided Kingdom: "If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand" (24).
 - 2) He continued with the Parable of the Divided House: "If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand" (25).
 - 3) These two brief parables paint a picture in our minds which we understand.
 - 4) Jesus then made the application of these parables to the current situation that becomes a mirror for the teachers to see the absurdity of their argument: "And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come" (26).
 - 5) Jesus has quickly opened a window for the teachers to see their "bad theology and faulty logic," but they refused to see it (Wiersbe, 51).
 - c. Jesus followed up with the slightly longer Parable of the Strong Man: "In fact, no one can enter a strong man's house without first tying him up. Then he can plunder the strong man's house" (27).
 - 1) The strong man is Satan.
 - 2) The one who ties him up and plunders him is Jesus. He is stronger than the strong man.
 - 3) The plunder Jesus takes is the demons that he casts out of the possessed.
 - 4) Jesus declared that he was not a subordinate of Satan. He was not even on the same side. He was/is a superior who thwarts the kingdom of evil led by Satan.
 - d. In his conclusion, Jesus opened the window of his parables even further so that the Jewish leaders could see God and His truth and their relationship to that truth: "Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin" (28-29).
 - 1) "Truly" or "Verily" (Gk., *amen*) comes from the Hebrew *emunah* which means "heavy, faithful, true, and reliable."
 - a) We use this word "A-men" as a conclusion to our prayers and faithful sayings.
 - b) In the NT it is used only by Jesus not at the end of his sayings but at the beginning of key statements of truth.
 - c) It was Jesus' way of telling his hearers to pay close attention.
 - 2) Jesus led not with judgment but with the possibility of forgiveness. God will forgive every sin and slander of anyone who will confess and believe.
 - 3) There is only one sin/slander that cannot be forgiven—blasphemy of the Holy Spirit.
 - 4) Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is the continual, repeated, rejection of God and His truth, especially as that truth is revealed in Jesus
 - 5) The Jewish teachers had already charged Jesus with blasphemy.
 - 6) Jesus turned the tables on them. He was not the blasphemer, they were. They had attributed the powerful work of God in Jesus' casting out of demons to Satan instead of to God.
 - a) The teachers and Pharisees continued to blaspheme God with their claims that Jesus "has an impure spirit" (30).
 - b) Jesus identified the true Spirit in which he worked was not an "impure spirit" (Gk., *pneuma akatharton*) but the Holy Spirit (Gk., *to pneuma to agion*) of God.

- e. Both Jesus' family and the teachers of the law opposed what Jesus was doing. Their analysis was much the same, and both groups had completely missed the truth.
 - 1) His family claimed, "He is beside himself" (21). He is crazy!
 - 2) The teachers claimed. "He has an unclean spirit" (30). He is demon possessed!
 - 3) These two parts of our Markan sandwich make the same point: Jesus' family and the Jewish leaders were both attempting to prevent him from continuing his work of proclaiming the coming of the kingdom of God.
 - 4) Jesus would overcome their opposition and even offer salvation to those who opposed Him.

C. Who is Jesus' Family? (31-35)

1. Now we come back to the storyline begun Mk 3:20-21. Jesus' family arrives. (31)
 - a. Note that Jesus' half-brother James would eventually come to believe in Jesus and played an important part in the early church (e.g., Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 and author of the Epistle of James).
 - b. I wonder about Mary's part in this action.
 - 1) This reference in Mk 3:31 and another in Mk 6:3 are the only places that she is mentioned in Mark.
 - 2) Perhaps her faith wavered or she did not fully understand the messages and experiences that she pondered in her heart (cf., Lk 2:19).
 - 3) Perhaps she was influenced in her actions by Jesus' half-brothers.
 - c. I believe that the intentions of Jesus' family were good.
 - 1) Sometimes there is a need for a family intervention to help those who are ill physically or mentally.
 - 2) Jesus understood their intentions but knew they were misguided and revealed the identity of his true family.
 2. Jesus' family couldn't get into the house, most likely due to the crowding. So, they sent someone in to tell Jesus, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you" (32).
 - a. Jesus did not go out to them not only due to the crowd but, I believe, for another reason.
 - 1) Generally, the presence of one's mother would have evoked a more active response by Jesus.
 - 2) I believe his response indicates that he was with his family. He was right where his Father wanted him to be much as he was when he stayed behind in the temple at age 12. He was doing his father's business and would not be distracted.
 - 3) His physical family was on the outside but his spiritual family was on the inside around him.
 - b. So, Jesus asked, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" (33)
 - 1) He looked at those sitting around him, most likely the Twelve, and declared them to be his brothers and sisters and mother, his family. (34)
 - 2) Remember that not everyone in the house (e.g., scribes, Pharisees, Judas, people healed, the curious) were his spiritual family. Some were there just for the miracles or to be near a famous person. Those who responded to his words about the kingdom/repentance with actions of faith were his true family.
 - 3) Ultimately, Jesus declared his family to be "Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother" (35).
 - c. Our place in God's kingdom family is not by blood birth. It is by new birth in the Spirit (cf., John 3). It is based on relationship with Jesus. The evidence of our membership in God's family is given by our obedience in doing the will of God in our lives.
 3. Our Markan sandwich is now complete. The theological interrelationship of these two stories should now be clear: Who is Jesus? Who is his family? What is my relationship to Him?
 - a. Jewish authorities and even Jesus' own family misunderstood and opposed him.
 - b. Jesus' true family are those who understand his origin, his message, and faithfully follow and support him in doing God's will.

D. Lessons for Us

1. We will face opposition and false accusations related to our work for God. Sometimes this opposition comes even from those closest to us.
2. You can't please everyone, so don't try. Just please God and let everyone else go.
3. We must not allow our house, the church, to become divided. We must maintain unity, even in our diversity, for the sake of the kingdom of God and the advancement of the Gospel.
4. We must never reject God and his work in others too quickly or from motives of jealousy and envy.
5. Do not take this passage as a call to abandon family but as a call to prioritize the work of God above everything and everyone else.
6. Who is your family? Sometimes church family is all the family that some people have. Be a good family member to everyone in both your spiritual family and your physical family.
7. Be an active part of the family of God as you do God's will in your life and encourage others as they also do God's will.