

MARK

We continue our study of Mark with Mark Chapter 3. Having remained in Capernaum, we find Jesus in the synagogue teaching on the Sabbath. As the chapter opens we also find his enemies sitting among the men in the synagogue, waiting for an opportunity and reason to accuse Jesus. This raises a good question for all of us: Have there ever been times in our lives when we were in worship, but we were not there to worship? I would wager that all of us have been guilty of this at some point, i.e., physically being in worship, but not actually there in spirit. This is because we may have been angry, bitter, worried, or jealous, etc. in our hearts; as a result, our minds were focused on all the wrong things, rather than being focused on worshipping Christ.

I have attended, and I know you have as well, churches where individuals in the congregation were sowing seeds of discord, driving division in the body, and seeking out personal agendas rather than worshipping their creator and savior. So it is as we begin the third chapter of Mark. Many have come to genuinely hear the Gospel, to hear Jesus teach and to be healed, but not everyone. Jesus' enemies were also present— just as they are today. In this lesson, we will continue to see this theme throughout the chapter; as Jesus continues to teach, heal, and confront his enemies.

Read Mark Chapter 3, then consider the following:

In the Synagogue, and on the Sabbath, Jesus tells a man with the shriveled hand to stand up. Did the man ask to be healed? Had he come there hoping to be healed, having heard of, or perhaps even having seen, the healing miracles Jesus had accomplished earlier? He may have been in the synagogue that morning hoping to be healed, but we are not told his reason. Instead Jesus, knowing the hearts of the men who had come to worship, was about to teach them a profound lesson.

1. What did Jesus know about the hearts of all the men in attendance, not just his enemies; and what lesson did he teach them through healing the man's hand?
 - a. ANSWER: He knew that they had "stubborn hearts," and this made him angry. It made him angry because he knew that their stubbornness was blinding them from seeing the truth; and that the Messiah, the "Anointed One," was standing right there in front of them. Their stubborn hearts indicated that they were not there to worship, nor to learn, not at all. When we are stubborn, we hold tightly to our own beliefs and instincts, refusing to see any other truth; and so it was that Sabbath morning.
2. Can you see from these first few verses that worship isn't about following man-made rules that make you "righteous" in man's eyes? Worship isn't physically centered, it's spiritually centered; and where your spirit is will impact how you worship. What are some of man's ideas about "proper" worship that may distract us, or even keep us, from worshipping?
 - a. ANSWER: When we focus on the physical, outward aspects of the teacher, the preacher, or the worship environment, we can be distracted. When we are more concerned about the robes that the choir is wearing on any given Sunday, or when we are upset over the music choices, or even the scripture references; then we are not focusing on the right things. When our focus is on finding errors in the church bulletin, or spotting someone not dressed "appropriately," then we are not in a spirit of worship. Further, when we allow the physical things and manmade rules of the world to be more important than the condition of our spirit and of those spirits around us, all these are things keep us from true worship. It is only after we reach the point that we humbly fall in front of the Savior that we can worship. The Bible tells us, "God is spirit and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth." This is true worship, not man's rules or agendas.
3. Who were Jesus' enemies in attendance at the synagogue? See Mark 3:6.
 - a. ANSWER: Some of Jesus' primary enemies, the Pharisees, were in attendance. In addition, another group of enemies were in attendance, the "Herodians." As we can see from this verse, the Pharisees were conspiring with this group.

4. Why would the members of two groups mentioned in Mark 3:6 want to kill Jesus just because he had healed a man with a shriveled hand?
 - a. ANSWER: As cited in the answer to the previous question, the other group of enemies mentioned by Mark in this passage were the "Herodians," a politically-connected elite group of wealthy Jews who wanted to maintain their position and wealth by being politically aligned with the Romans. In their view, anything that threatened this relationship, and their wealth and influence, had to be dealt with, and dealt with right away.
5. See Mark 3:7-12. Headed back to the lake, the Sea of Galilee, from the Synagogue, large crowds from all over Jordan and Israel, and as far north as Lebanon, were coming to hear Jesus; many were looking for healing. The crowds were getting larger and larger as word spread of Jesus' teachings about the Good News, the Gospel, and his miraculous healing power. The places mentioned in these verses range from the farthest points of southern Israel and Jordan in the north to as far as southern Lebanon. The word had spread, and thousands were coming to Galilee to hear and see Jesus. Pressing at him from all sides for healing, Jesus told his disciples to get a boat so he could stand off-shore and teach while the crowds remained on the shoreline. Who else was present in that crowd, and what did they think of Jesus?
 - a. ANSWER: Also present in the crowd were impure spirits. They were "falling down before him," and acknowledging that Jesus was the Son of God.
6. What can we learn from the reaction of the impure spirits in these verses?
 - a. ANSWER 1: Clearly the spirit world, i.e., Satan and his demons, know who Jesus is; as they even fall down before him in these verses. This shows us that Jesus had authority over the entire spirit world, and it demonstrates that simply acknowledging God exists will not save us.
 - b. ANSWER 2: It also shows us that the spirit world is real, and it is as much an enemy of Christ today as it was then.
 - c. ANSWER 3: Finally, it reassures us that, through Jesus, we have nothing to fear regarding evil spirits. Just as Jesus has authority over them, in his name, so do we—as we will see in the next few verses.
7. Jesus now calls out his chosen Apostles from among the many disciples following him. What does he appoint them to do, and what authority does he give them? (see Mark 3:13-19)
 - a. ANSWER: He appoints them to preach, and he gives them authority to drive out demons. Jesus never sends us out alone, and he never sends us out without the power to accomplish his purpose, his will. Just as it was true then, it is still true today. While not all of us have the gift of healing, or teaching, or preaching, etc., we are each given a gift or gifts to use once we are anointed with the Holy Spirit. Then it is our job to use that gift to His glory, and for the purpose that it was given us.
8. In Mark 3:20-35, we next find Jesus back in a house in Capernaum, continuing to teach and to heal. He is working literally night and day, driving out demons, healing, and teaching. Furthermore, the crowds are becoming so intense that he is not even eating, causing his friends and family to worry about his health and fear that he was losing his mind. Wanting to care for him, they head for the house where another very large crowd has gathered inside the house. In contrast to his friends and family who are concerned about his health, the Scribes are also present. What is their concern?
 - a. ANSWER: The Scribes could not explain how Jesus was able to drive out demons unless they reasoned Jesus was himself in allegiance with the devil, Satan. This concerned them greatly, because Jesus' ability to drive out demons was creating larger and larger crowds from all over the countryside. He was gaining such a large following that it was threatening their position and power over the people. Here again, their inability to see Jesus as the true Messiah was blinding them to the truth.
9. In his reply to the Scribes, Christ shows them the error of their logic. Since a house divided among itself cannot stand, it is not logical that Jesus and Satan would be on the same team, i.e., in league with one another. As part of his response, what does he intend to convey in verse 27? "But no one can enter the strong man's house and plunder his property unless he first binds the strong man, and then he will plunder his house."
 - a. ANSWER: Jesus was referring to Satan as the "strong man," and in binding him, Jesus was indicating he had power over Satan. By binding up the strong man, Jesus then sets the possessions of the strong man free. That is, all of those under the curse of Satan and sin can be set free by Jesus. Jesus had come into our world, in effect, to rob the strong man—to bind up Satan and to set free all those enslaved by him.
10. In Mark 3:31-35, we read that Jesus' family came to the house where he was teaching; however, being unable to get inside, they sent word in to tell Jesus that they were outside. What was wrong with his family coming to see him? Why did Jesus respond the way that he did?
 - a. ANSWER: Jesus' family had come to restrain his activity; they felt that he was overdoing it and was acting like a mad man, someone who could easily lose his mind if they didn't step in and stop him from working at his current pace. Jesus was aware of their motive, and, moreover, he referred to all those who sitting around him, learning and seeking to know about the Gospel and his coming kingdom, as his "family." "For whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother." His family's motives ran counter to God's will; that is why Jesus responded as he did.

In our next lesson, Jesus returns to the shoreline of the Sea of Galilee to teach. Mark will take us "inside the crowd," so that we can hear what Jesus is teaching and why it was so radical in its day. In this lesson, we have seen multiple examples of Jesus' enemies at work: the Pharisees in the synagogue, the impure spirits on the shores of Galilee, and then, back at the house, the Scribes confronting him as a demon working for Satan (followed by his family trying to stop him from continuing to teach).

Even today in our own lives, we will have well-intentioned people, in addition to enemies, trying to stop or misdirect us from accomplishing God's will in our lives. Just as Jesus did, we should, in prayer and humility, ignore the naysayers, the negative thinkers, the rules-based theology of the day, and push ahead; keeping our eyes solely on the Cross.

Thanks for studying with us.

In Christ,

Wes