

## Jesus Counters the 1-2

Pt 2 Mark 3:31-34

The Storm Clouds have arrived. The leaders of society are making backroom deals with Herod's people to get rid of God's Son. They think he's a blasphemer and that His power is not from God: a dangerous deceiver and a puppet of Satan.

Why?

- He makes larger than life claims...your sins are forgiven,
- He's not from their religious training system
- He challenges their beliefs and practices

We'd better not:

- Minimize Jesus' claims
- Rely too heavily on our training system
- Think we've arrived (answer man, pious)

Boxing metaphor

God's Son entered the world's ring battle for souls. Satan is throwing a 1-2 punch combination. His first strike was to confuse...to knock down Jesus' reputation with the crowds.

"By the prince of demons, he is casting out demons."

Jesus parries and leans in for a quick counter punch...by inviting

them inside. He puts them off balance with a question- parable. How can Satan drive out Satan? Those with a believing heart understand from Jesus' parable that Jesus is casting out demons because he is stronger than Satan. And then Jesus lands a surprise counter punch.

"Whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven." The teachers of the law are in danger of being under God's wrath forever. Who can talk like that, but God's Son?

This section from v20-35 is a sandwich - one story inside another. Like meat between 2 pieces of bread. The bread on the bottom is v 20-21. It's to give us the sense that time is ticking.

Jesus' family is on their way. The meat (inside story) is v 22-30. It heightens the tension because Jesus is facing opposition while another is about to arrive. Both stories are about important people who misunderstand Jesus and try to control Him. All this while His followers listen at His feet.

No one has the authority to control Jesus. The scribes end up dishonored and in danger of being

eternally condemned. We know there is an unseen enemy behind them. In a few weeks, one of Jesus' closest disciples will try to control Him. Jesus chastises that disciple as if he were the embodiment of Satan (8:32-33).

We've been anticipating the arrival of Jesus' family and friends. Now they're here. Satan's dominant fist has wound up all the way from Nazareth. The fist of family obligation.

It's ironic, that the ones who should be the insiders are on the outside. And the common people (even tax collectors) are on the inside with a backstage pass. And the darker irony: His family arrives late, not to sit at his feet but to take him away.

### **Read V31-32**

When you're late to see Jesus...it's going to be a long line up.

Disneyland tips: Buy your tickets online so you can go straight through the entrance. Buy a Fastpasses for key attractions and stay at a hotel in the park. Take advantage of extra magic morning (early hours). Send only one person in your party to get the Fastpasses. Oh, they got that one. (extra tip: send a small person).

Bible scholars agree that Joseph may have passed away by this time. Mary had other children after Jesus. The bible mentions James, Joses (Joseph), Judas and Simon...and unnamed sisters (Mk 6:3, Matt 13:55-56). There also could have been close friends of the family with them. I wonder sometimes if Mary was really there to make sure Jesus wasn't abused in the process.

So we have the bait set for the trap.

"Jesus, you're family is here to see you."

How much does Jesus know of their intentions? He could sure read the Pharisee's thoughts. If it were us, we'd probably feel a sense of family obligation. People watching, pressure rising.

Jesus didn't move. Everyone's probably thinking, "aren't you going to attend to your family?"

An Israelite doesn't mess around with family.

A very simple summary is that the family system was more interdependent and more top down. They had to rely on and protect one another more than we do. Many worked the land (livestock, grain or fruit). Everyone had to work hard just to have enough food under a very

unfair tax system. Most had to sell their land to pay debts in a bad year and continue paying it off as renters.

Besides surviving, the top priority was 'keeping to the code' and 'national pride'. The tradition of the elders was a very strict expansion of the law of Moses. Everyone had to be as pious as a priest. A simple thing like washing hands was turned into a religious ceremony to keep all Israel pure. If you were a kid, your life was under the watchful eyes of parents, possibly grandparents, you're grown up older brother and his family living there, siblings...and possibly a widow or a visiting cousin.

The family heritage was extremely important. It affected status, land ownership and responsibility for extended family (widows, orphans).

So I say again, you don't mess with family in Israel.

### **Read V33**

Now everyone is caught off guard. Is He confused? Are the rumors about his sanity true? Or maybe this has something to do with the rumors about his 'real' father. He has everyone's attention.

### **Read V34**

**Here is my family**

What a lift for those in the circle around him! But those who assume they are close to Jesus...need to think again. Jesus honors the ones who make sacrifices to be with Him...to listen and follow.

The 12 are newbies. And there would have been a cluster of others too. Men and women...many without their families right now.

We know there are women in that circle from Lk 8. The Israelites were patriarchal (father rules). Women could be treated as second-class citizens. It was the father's duty to see that the children were educated (especially the Tora). Sometime there were resources for girls to be educated...sometimes not. Girls were to stay inside protected from any hint of being compromised for marriage. It was a family value for the girls to marry well and perhaps increase their land. Most marriages were arranged. The girl would go from the control of her father to the control of her husband...and his whole family (mother-in-law included). During times of famine, young girls were most vulnerable to starvation because more food was needed for the outside workers.

So now imagine you are the 'lesser of the lessers: a Galilean and a woman. Jesus looks you in the eye and says, "you are my family because you are here, obeying God." Girls can be "insiders" in God's kingdom.

Jesus lifts up His identity with the ones who follow him...above His natural family identity. The one's who raised Him - whose family tree goes back to King David are less important to Him now than this rag tag group of common Galileans (tax-collector and all). God's kingdom people are not identified by family status. God's kingdom people are identified by their **closeness to Jesus**. Jesus tells us why this circle is so privileged and invites the rest of us in.

### **Read V35**

#### **'Whoever'**

That can be you and me and our neighbor. Sometimes we might question a person's confession of Christ on death row, yet 'whoever' is as true today as it was when Jesus pardoned the thief on the cross beside Him. Jesus is the head of doing the will of God. What a privilege to be learning from His words and actions.

#### **'Does God's will'**

So far in Mark's Gospel, there isn't a lot of material on the will of God. "God's awaited Kingdom is near, believe, follow me." We'll be getting more details about the Kingdom of God in the following chapters. The point now is that commitment to Jesus opens the door to God's way. The disciples committed to Jesus and Jesus guided them on the path of doing God's will. And now we have God's word.

I once met a young man who was newly excited about Christianity because it answered his questions about origins. But he continued to think and talk like a person who did not know Jesus well. He fell away from the faith and divorced his wife. He didn't really **start with Jesus**. Start with Jesus. Here's another key. In Psalm 143:10 King David asks the Lord, teach me to **do your will**. God's will is to do God's will. "Come on, that sounds like we're working our way to heaven." Ah, but it comes from the inside out...sometimes even with reluctance.

I'll try to explain it with a story about Peter (Acts 10-11)

When Jesus ascended to heaven, He sent the Holy Spirit. And at Pentecost the Holy Spirit

descended on Jesus' disciples in a unique way: flames, the sound of violent winds and speaking in many languages (tongues). After Peter's sermon that day, 3000 more were baptized!

As the gospel went out from Jerusalem to Samaria and into Gentile territory Peter went up North to support. Then one day God asked him to do the unthinkable and go against his whole religious upbringing, against his understanding of the food laws of Moses. God declared to him all foods were clean. Was Peter freaked? Yes.

Then God told him to go with the Gentiles He had sent. Peter grew up with the understanding that Gentiles were unclean. You don't spend time alone with them or do business with them. And certainly not go in their homes. You'd be doing purification exercises forever. Did Peter go? Yes. He didn't understand but he obeyed God anyway.

Peter didn't know yet but God was doing a major expansion to His family. He was grafting all nations into the vine of Christ. The way into God's family forever. God was about to show the leader of the 12, His anointing of Gentiles for salvation. God set Peter up for a

slam-dunk. It took a bit for Peter to clue in but all he needed to do was to go to Cornelius' house and explain how Jesus fit into God's plan of salvation. Immediately they believed and were filled with the Holy Spirit. God gave the special sign of speaking in tongues- just like the disciples so there would be no doubt.

Peter was asked to stay in the Gentile home a few days to give them a good start. And he did. Peter had some explaining to do when he got back to Jerusalem. Some Jewish believers were hopping mad.

### **Read acts 11:15-18**

Did Peter have advanced knowledge of God's will? No. Do you think if Peter had refused to obey God, we would not have been grafted into the vine God began with Abraham? Salvation by faith?

No, Peter would've missed out on that blessing.

God was patient to bring Peter along step-by-step. Peter had to believe and obey.

God's will is for us to Love and respond to Him appropriately. Make every day with Him count. That's what the circle of disciples were doing. Sure they started out as knuckleheads. That gives us

hope.

Back to David's request to have God teach him to do His will.

Anybody can pray for God to do the things they want. Bless me, protect me etc.

But what about praying that God takes charge. Change me on the inside. Fill me with the Holy Spirit. Not my will but your will be done. It's in the Lord's prayer.

We're clay in the Potter's hands. We'll stop getting bogged down with distractions and inner battles. We'll have rest for our soul when we devote ourselves to paying attention to God first. Our time here is precious.

### **Ephesians 5:15-21 paraphrase**

We all need to be careful how we live – not as fools but wise, making the most of every opportunity, because evil is still all around us.

The wisdom to see God's way comes when we give God the control...being filled with the Holy Spirit. We see God's in control when we're encouraging one another and thanking God using His songs. We know Jesus is Lord of the family, when we put one another ahead of ourselves. Back to our passage in Mark.

**'Is'** my brother and sister and mother (Jesus' father 1:11).

Not 'will be' but 'is now'. That takes faith. Already but not yet fully. Now and Someday completely.

Jesus opens the way to be in a 'family like' relationship with Him in God's kingdom. Not by a family name but by a faith that responds to God.

Those words would have been scandalous and shocking. But 30 years later, when Mark wrote this Gospel, it would have been words of life. God's new family of Christians were scattered under the horrible persecution of Emperor Nero. They risked everything. In constant danger from being reported (by family members) then tortured and killed. They believed God's kingdom family through Jesus to be the **highest calling**.

Jesus counter attacked Satan's attempt to knock Him out. Instead of being humiliated and silenced, He sent a life-giving encouragement to Christians throughout the centuries.