

The Gospel of Mark

(Mid-Week Bible Study)

Week 4: Following Jesus in a Divided World -- Mark 3:1–35

Picture the synagogue on a Sabbath morning. A man with a withered hand sits where he has always sat, in a quiet corner perhaps, his crippled hand tucked carefully out of sight. He has lived with that hand a long time. He has learned to compensate. He has learned to swallow the pitying glances or to look the other way when they come. This is a normal Sabbath, the rituals are familiar, the same faces are present, and there is no reason to expect that today will be any different from the last hundred sabbaths of his life. And then Jesus walks in.

Mark 3 is one of the most dramatic chapters in the Gospel. By the time it ends, lines are being drawn in every direction. Religious leaders, secular politicians, demons, crowds, disciples, and even Jesus' own family will all take a position about Him. Some will follow Him to the boats. Some will plot how to kill Him. Some will whisper that He has lost His mind. The world He has stepped into is a divided world, and the dividing question is always the same. What will you do with Jesus?

There is something both honest and uncomfortable about this chapter. Mark refuses to pretend that following Jesus is a quiet, private hobby that fits neatly inside everyone's preferred lifestyle. Following Jesus, Mark says, is going to put you on the same side of the room as some surprising people and on the opposite side of the room from others. It will reorder your understanding of who counts as family. It will press on your loyalty to traditions you have held all your life. It will reveal which voices you have been listening to.

But the chapter is also full of hope. Jesus deliberately gathers a small, ordinary group of men to be with Him on a mountain. He stretches out His own arm, and a withered hand becomes whole. He announces that the strong man is being bound, that Satan's house is being plundered, and that His true family is anyone, anywhere, who hears God and does what God says. In a divided world, Jesus is gathering a people, healing what is broken, and offering us a place at His side. The question Mark presses on us this week is simply where we are willing to stand when the lines are drawn.

Group Discussion: Look across the whole of Mark 3. People divide over Jesus in many different ways in this chapter. The Pharisees harden. The crowds press in. The demons confess in fear. The disciples follow Him up a mountain. His own family questions His sanity. Why does Jesus, of all people, provoke this kind of dividing response, and where do you see similar dividing lines today over who Jesus is and what it means to follow Him?

Personal Reflection: The healed man in the synagogue had to stand up in front of everyone and stretch out the hand he had been hiding. In doing so, he was choosing to side openly with Jesus

in a room full of people who did not want Him there. Where in your own life is Jesus asking you to “stand up” and “stretch out” something you have been hiding, in front of people whose approval would have been safer to keep?

Read Mark 3:1–35

Study Questions

1. Jesus enters the synagogue, sees the man with the withered hand, and asks the watchful religious leaders, “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?” (v. 4). What is Jesus teaching about the true purpose of God’s law, and how does His question expose the hardness of heart that can grow inside religious people who know the rules well?
2. Mark says Jesus looked around at them “with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart” (v. 5). Where in your own walk are you most prone to a hardness of heart, a place where the right answer matters more to you than the actual person in front of you, and how would you recognize it in yourself if it began to grow?
3. When Jesus moves toward the sea, the crowds press in so heavily that He has to teach from a small boat, and the unclean spirits cry out, “You are the Son of God” (vv. 7–11). What does it mean that the demons recognize Jesus’ identity with perfect accuracy and yet remain His enemies, and what does this tell us about the difference between knowing the truth about Jesus and submitting to Him as Lord?
4. In verses 13–14, Jesus calls the Twelve up to the mountain, “and he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach.” Notice the order. Be with Him first; then go out. Where in your life are you tempted to skip the “with Him” part and rush ahead to the “sent out” part, and what does that imbalance produce in your soul over time?
5. Jesus deliberately chooses and names twelve specific men in verses 13–19. Looking at the strange variety of the group (fishermen, a tax collector, a former Zealot, even Judas who would betray Him) and at the number twelve itself, what is Jesus signaling about the kind of community He is forming, and how does this scene anticipate the foundation of His church?
6. The text says Jesus’ family came out to seize Him because people were saying, “He is out of his mind” (v. 21). Even those closest to Him by blood did not at first understand Him. Where in your own life have you felt the cost of following Jesus inside your own family or your closest relationships, and how do you keep walking with Him faithfully when the people you love most do not yet see what you see?
7. The scribes from Jerusalem accuse Jesus of casting out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons (v. 22). Jesus responds with the saying of a kingdom and a house divided against itself, and then He pictures a “strong man” being bound and his house plundered (vv. 23–27). What is Jesus claiming about the kingdom of God, the defeat of Satan, and His own authority in this confrontation?

8. It is easier than we think to call good evil and to assign the work of God's Spirit to some other source. Where in your own life are you tempted to dismiss, mock, or quietly rename something the Lord is clearly doing because it is uncomfortable or because it threatens your control, and what does that pattern reveal about your heart?
9. Jesus says, "Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin" (vv. 28–29). What is the "blasphemy against the Holy Spirit," what is it not, and how should this passage shape both our reverence for the Spirit's work and our assurance as believers who have responded to the gospel in faith, repentance, confession, and baptism?
10. The chapter ends with Jesus' true family being defined not by blood but by obedience. "Whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother" (v. 35). As you close this divided chapter, where is Jesus calling you to stand more openly with His family by actually doing the will of God in some concrete area He has been pressing on your heart, even when it costs you the approval of others?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Isaiah 42:1–4, the gentle Servant who will not break a bruised reed; Ephesians 4:11–16, the gifts Christ gave the church (apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers) for the building up of His body; Hebrews 10:26–31, a sober warning about deliberately turning from the truth we have received; 1 John 5:16–17, John's tender words about sin and intercessory prayer; Matthew 12:46–50, Matthew's parallel account of Jesus redefining family around the will of God.