

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 8/8/04 Brad Brandt

Mark 3:20-35 "When Your Family Thinks You're Crazy" **

Main Idea: If you do God's will, don't expect everyone to applaud. It's quite possible those closest to you, even your own family, may think you're crazy. It happened to Jesus in Mark 3:20-35.

I. Jesus was misunderstood (20-21).

A. Here's what He did (20).

1. Jesus was spending time with the lost.
2. Jesus was spending time with His disciples.

B. Here's how His family reacted (21).

1. They tried to stop Him.
2. They thought He was insane.

II. Jesus was maligned (22-30).

A. The scribes claimed Jesus was devil-possessed (22).

B. Jesus exposed the fallacy of their logic (23-30).

1. In so doing He defended Himself (23-27).
2. In so doing He delivered a serious warning (28-30).

III. Jesus made the most of the opportunity (31-35).

A. Your family is important.

1. Jesus had one.
2. Jesus cared for His.

B. God's family is more important.

1. To belong, you must do God's will.
2. If you belong, you have a new set of values.

Make It Personal: Ask yourself three questions...

1. Are you in God's family?
2. Do you value God's family?
3. Are you sure?

As the story goes, shortly after the 1912 presidential election, Woodrow Wilson visited an aged aunt whom he hadn't seen for a long time. "What are you doing these days, Woodrow?" she asked. "I've just been elected president," replied Wilson. "Oh, yes? President of what?" inquired the aunt. "Of the United States." "Don't be silly!" she snorted impatiently. It was perhaps the greatest moment of his life and his own relative didn't believe him!

This past week, on two separate occasions I had children come to me desiring to share some good news. "What is it?" I asked. "I received Jesus as my Savior," both children explained. It thrilled my heart to hear that God's Spirit is at work in the lives of these young individuals.

Did you realize that people respond differently to the news that God is at work in someone's life? When a person gets saved, family members typically rejoice at the good news. They encourage. They support. But sometimes, they bristle. Sometimes they ridicule. Sometimes they make it difficult for the person to do what God wants them to do, like go to church or live out their newly found Christian values.

How did people respond when *you* began to seek first the kingdom of God? It's a great thing to do God's will, right? Yes, it sure is. It's always good to do God's will. But it's not always popular, even with family members, sometimes *especially* with family members.

A century ago a bishop pronounced from his pulpit and in the periodical he edited that heavier-than-air flight

was both impossible and contrary to the will of God. The irony is that Bishop Wright had two sons, Orville and Wilbur! Wright was wrong. Sure of himself, but wrong.

Family members can make wrong assessments at times. That's not just about flying machines, either. It includes God's will, too.

I'll say it straight. If you do God's will, don't expect everyone to applaud. It's quite possible those closest to you, even your own family, may think you're crazy. If that happens (and for some it may be *happening*), know this. You are in good company. It happened to Jesus. According to Mark 3:20-35 His own family thought He was crazy.

As we examine the three scenes in the story this morning, we're going to learn some important things about Jesus. We're also going to learn something very important about how to live for Jesus when those closest to you don't share your enthusiasm.

I. Jesus was misunderstood (20-21).

A word about the setting. Jesus' popularity is peaking. He's been preaching the good news, healing the sick, and rescuing the demon-possessed for some time now, and the crowds are coming. The religious leaders, of course, don't like it and have already set in motion the plot to kill Jesus (3:6).

In our last study we saw Jesus make what was perhaps His most important decision—outside of the cross. After spending the night with His Father in prayer, He chose twelve men to be with Him, designating them apostles. From this point on He was going to invest Himself into these men who would carry on the mission after His departure.

Then came the misunderstanding. The very next account in Mark's gospel shows that those closest to the Master didn't understand.

Famous Trial Lawyer Clarence Darrow: "I have suffered from being misunderstood, but I would have suffered a lot more if I had been understood."

Jesus' family didn't understand Him. It's that simple. Let's enter the story...

A. Here's what He did (20). "Then Jesus entered a house [possibly the house in Capernaum that belonged to Simon and Andrew, the one Jesus used as headquarters for His Galilean ministry; the NAS says He "came home"], and again a crowd gathered [here we go again, another crowd of people wanting to be with Jesus], so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat."

The house was packed. Mark says neither Jesus nor His disciples [possibly referring to the Twelve] were able to eat. The text doesn't explain why they weren't able. Was it because they didn't want to eat in front of guests? I don't think so. I get the sense that Jesus was simply so focused on the needs of others that He ignored His own needs, that spiritual needs took precedent over physical needs. That kind of supernatural perspective is crazy to the natural man, as we'll see shortly.

So here are the facts. Jesus was engaged in two activities in the house.

1. *Jesus was spending time with the lost.* And two...

2. *Jesus was spending time with His disciples.* He was engaged in the ministries of evangelism and edification, so much so that He ignored His own personal needs.

B. Here's how His family reacted (21). "When his family heard about this, they went to take charge

of him, for they said, 'He is out of his mind.'"

The KJV says, "When his friends heard of it." The NAS refers to them as "His own people." The original text literally reads, "Those with Him." It's a Greek idiom that refers to kinsmen. The rest of the story makes it clear that the ones making the charge in verse 21 are the same ones that arrived at the house in verse 31, the latter verse specifically identifying them as Jesus' mother and brothers.

Verse 21 indicates that Jesus' family members, who are living in Nazareth, hear the news about what their kinsman is doing in Capernaum. Their response is twofold.

1. *They tried to stop Him.* To do so they set out to make the thirty mile trip from Nazareth to Capernaum (they won't arrive until verse 31). And why did they go? They apparently thought He was working too much, that He was ignoring His personal and physical needs for food and rest. Mark says they determined to "take charge of Him," indicating they planned to take Jesus home with them and force Him to get some rest.

In fact, they concluded the overwork had taken a toll on His mental stability. Simply put...

2. *They thought He was insane.* "He is out of his mind," they said. He is "beside himself," as the KJV puts it.

It's strange. If an athlete devotes himself to intense training, we say he's dedicated. If a musician or artist puts in countless hours cultivating their creativity, doing so day after day for years, we applaud their diligence. If a businessman sacrifices his health and family by putting in eighty hours a week, we say he's making necessary sacrifices for the company. If a soldier forfeits sleep and personal time in rigorous acts of self-denial we cheer him on because we know it's for the good of the country.

But if a person gets serious about serving God, I mean if a person shows by devoted living that God's Word is more important than food itself and that God's work is more vital than any personal agenda, we say, "That guy is a fanatic. He's so heavenly minded that he's no earthly good."

Radical is okay in just about any realm, as long as it's not an adjective for Christianity. The world doesn't like radical Christians. Take that a step further. Most church members don't like radical Christians, for they break the curve of the status quo.

We're so prone to criticize what we don't understand...

"Mom and Dad," 21-year-old Steve began as he spoke to his parents, "I appreciate all you've done for me, making it possible for me to get a good education and all. As you know I'll be finishing college next year. What you don't know is that God's been working in my heart. I think He wants me to be a missionary in a third-world country."

You could cut the air with a knife. Finally, Steve's mother broke the silence with a sniffle, then these words. "You mean you're going to move to another country. You're going to...*leave us?*"

"Yes, I believe that's what God wants. If He would give His best for us, namely His Son, how can I do less than give my all to Him?"

At which point Steve's father blurted out, "You can't do that, son. Be sensible. The family business is yours to take over. That's always been the plan. You can serve the Lord right here just like we've always said. Now, that's enough of this foolishness. End of conversation."

Yes, what Jesus' family did with Him happens all the time in our day, perhaps in our very families...

"Dad," 17-year-old Sally begins her carefully thought out words, "I know you've always wanted me to go to

State like you did, but I think I'd like to go to a Christian college." To which she hears the words, "What?! Where's your head? If you want to get a good job some day you need to go to a reputable school, not some glorified Sunday School class..."

Know this. God's work often seems foolish to those not in tune with God's will. It's true. God's work isn't your number one priority if God's will isn't your number one value. That's why Jesus' earthly family members could see the amazing work Jesus was doing and draw the conclusion that He was out of His mind.

History makes it clear that servants of God were often misunderstood (or worse) by their families and friends. Many people in Chicago called D. L. Moody, "Crazy Moody." "What crack-brained fanatics!" was the remark the gentlemen of the eighteenth century made about Wesley and Whitefield.

Ponder these words by J. D. Jones: "The world honors the man who for the sake of fame risks his life in battle; but if a man risks his life for souls for whom Christ died, it counts him a fool. The only kind of religion the world tolerates is religion of the tepid, Laodicean sort. But religion that breaks through the bonds of respectability and convention, religion that is earnest, red-hot, and means business, it calls 'madness.'"

Has anybody accused you of being crazy lately? If not, why not? Is it because what you have isn't much different from what they have?

So there's scene #1. Jesus was misunderstood.

II. Jesus was maligned (22-30).

While Jesus' family members were on their way to accost the Lord, Jesus encountered another confrontation, this one with the seemingly ever-present religious watchdogs of the day. Verse 22—"And the teachers of the law [KJV, the scribes] who came down from Jerusalem said, 'He is possessed by Beelzebub! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons.'" Note their charge. It's a severe one.

A. The scribes claimed Jesus was devil-possessed (22). "Beelzebub" means "master of the house." It refers to "the prince of demons," that is, "Satan" or the devil.

It's amazing how two people can look at the same evidence and come to such divergent conclusions. The disciples looked at Jesus' miracles of healing and demon-casting and concluded, "It's proof that He is the Messiah!" The religious leaders saw the same miracles and they didn't deny them (they couldn't). But they could reinterpret their significance, which they did. "Jesus, the Messiah? No way. He's no Messiah. He is possessed. He is under the control of the devil himself and that's how he's doing these spectacular things, by the devil's power."

It's not the last time the critics used this ludicrous tactic to discredit Jesus and limit His influence. Following His teaching on the Good Shepherd, the Jews were divided and John 10:20 records, "Many of them said, 'He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?'"

R. Alan Cole makes the point, "It is a strange paradox that in any times of religious revival or obvious working of God's Spirit, it is often the religious leaders who oppose the work of God most strenuously, and seem to misunderstand it most willfully."

B. Jesus exposed the fallacy of their logic (23-30). They weren't thinking straight and if Jesus let it go unchecked the result would be confusion for others. So Jesus addressed their accusation head-on and thereby accomplished two results.

1. *In so doing He defended Himself (23-27).* "So Jesus called them and spoke to them in parables." Stop there momentarily. It's the first mention of parables in Mark (we'll see the term seven times in chapter four).

The English word *parable* comes from two Greek words that mean "to cast alongside" (*para*—alongside; and *ballo*—to throw or cast). A parable is a story or figure placed alongside a teaching to help us understand its meaning.

Mark indicates that Jesus used some comparisons (parables) to show just how preposterous the scribes' accusation was. Verse 23 again—"How can Satan drive out Satan?" That was their charge. "You cast out demons by the prince of demons!" Were they right? No way. To illustrate just how absurd the suggestion was Jesus offered two comparisons.

The first is in verse 24—If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand."

The second is in verse 25—"If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand." Divided things don't stand. They can't stand but soon fall. That's true for everything from ball teams to families, from churches to countries. Divided things fall apart. They can't stand.

A word of application. Husbands and wives, if you aren't on the same page you're in trouble. Maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow, but the day is coming. Divided things can't stand. If you're not together, if you're on separate pages when it comes to how you view money, parenting, church, in-laws, long-term goals, it's time to get on the same page? You say, "How do we do that? Our opinions have differed for years." If you want to get on the same page, you must first settle the issue of which *book* you're going to use. Resolve to lay personal feelings aside and build your home on *the Book*.

Verse 26—"And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come." Satan is foolish—how else can you explain how a creature would try to upstage the Creator—but he's not stupid. His agenda is to destroy God, not himself.

Verse 27—"In fact, no one can enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he can rob his house." That's exactly what Jesus did. He came to earth, to Satan's "turf," in order to rescue those held hostage by Satan. To put it another way, if one is to set slaves free from the tyrant who holds them, one must first overcome the tyrant himself. To accomplish His mission Jesus first had to "tie up the strong man." Wessel's offers a helpful reminder, "Though 'tied,' Satan is on a long chain and will not be finally defeated till the End."

Jesus' argument goes like this: "If I am doing what I am doing by Satan's power, then Satan is actually working against himself. If Satan is casting out Satan, there's civil war within the kingdom of darkness. Satan is committing suicide. That's ludicrous."

But Jesus wasn't done yet. After defending Himself He "turned up the heat" in verses 28-30, making it clear the allegation was no small matter.

2. *In so doing He delivered a serious warning (28-30).* "I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin.' He said this because they were saying, 'He has an evil spirit.'"

This is a serious warning, without question. But what did Jesus mean by it? He says that there is forgiveness for sins and blasphemies. But there is a sin for which there is no forgiveness, that is, a sin against the Holy Spirit. This is an "eternal sin."

What's He talking about? Mark says in the note at the end, "He said this because *they* [the scribes] were saying, "He has an evil spirit." There's the sin Jesus is talking about. The scribes attributed Jesus' healing to Satan's power rather than to the Holy Spirit.

Note that the Lord here made a distinction between all other blasphemies and blasphemy against the Holy

Spirit. Why this distinction?

The scribes weren't acting in ignorance. They saw the miracle, a Holy Spirit produced miracle. They knew what they had witnessed was no work of Satan. They knew this was the work of God. But they deliberately denied the truth they knew. They intentionally reinterpreted the facts and, instead of giving God glory, attributed the miracles to Satan himself. A person who does that is, as Jesus declared, "guilty of an eternal sin."

Wessel, in quoting Mitton, says, "To call what is good evil (Isa 5:20) when you know well that it is good, because prejudice and ill will hold you on bondage, that is the worst sin of all."

And don't miss this. Jesus doesn't say the scribes committed this sin, not yet anyway. But they were "in the danger zone, they were approaching the sin," as G. Campbell Morgan puts it.

Throughout history many have struggled with the thought, "Have I committed the unpardonable sin?" I'd like to turn to several commentators for help at this point:

Cole refers to this as "the sin of the willfully blind," those "who persistently refuse the illumination of the Spirit, oppose the Spirit's work, and justify themselves in doing so by deliberately misrepresenting Him."

J. Vernon McGee says it's impossible to commit an unpardonable sin today. "There is no such thing as being able to commit a sin today that He will not forgive. The attitude and state of the unbeliever is unpardonable—not the act."

Wessel comments, "Surely what Jesus is speaking of here is not an isolated act but a settled condition of the soul—the result of a long history of repeated and willful acts of sin. And if the person involved cannot be forgiven it is not so much that God refuses to forgive as it is the sinner refuses to allow him. Ryle's famous words are great reassurance to any who might be anxious about this sin: 'There is such a thing as a sin which is never forgiven. But those who are troubled about it are most unlikely to have committed it.' On the other hand, those who actually do commit the sin are so dominated by evil that it is unlikely that they would be aware of it."

One more, this by J. D. Jones, "This passage...does not speak of any act of sin as unpardonable. It does not speak of unpardonable sin at all. What it speaks of is eternal sin. And that is the sin which cannot be pardoned, the sin which is eternal. It cannot be pardoned, just because it is eternal. A man may so harden himself in sin as to become incapable of repenting, and because he cannot repent he cannot be forgiven..."

Then Jones offers this follow-up, "Does a man ever get into this awful state? I cannot tell; but at any rate those who go mourning because they think they have committed this sin, prove by their very broken-heartedness that they have not committed it. When a man gets into the grip of 'eternal sin' he does not care—he is past feeling."

How do you feel about *your sins*, my friend? Do you see them? Do they grip you? Is your heart tender? If so, it's the work of God's gracious Spirit. And if it is, look to the cross, for there's cleansing there.

Jesus was misunderstood, then maligned. Thirdly...

III. Jesus made the most of the opportunity (31-35).

Verse 31—"Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived [arrived from Nazareth where they left in verse 21]. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him." Note those first words carefully. Jesus had a mother *and* brothers. You say, "I thought Mary was a virgin." She was, prior to conceiving Jesus. But later she bore children fathered by Joseph.

I remember a few years ago I was leading a home Bible study and the subject of Mary came up. A man from a Roman Catholic background insisted that Mary had no other children. I asked the group to turn to this text and read it. "Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived." The man read it slowly and began to think out loud, "Well, I see it, but I still don't *believe* it."

Verse 32—"A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, 'Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.'" Remember, they're looking for Him because they think He's lost His mind and they intend to take Him home.

That's the setting, a misunderstanding. But Jesus was the Master at taking situations and turning them into teaching opportunities.

Verse 33—"Who are my mother and my brothers?' he asked. R. Alan Cole observes, "His mother and his brothers seem to have tried to presume upon their 'natural' family relationship." But Jesus would have none of it. Contrary to what some denominations assert with their extra-exaltation of Mary, "a temporary physical relationship to the incarnate Lord gives no special claim to him," again in the words of Cole.

Next came the punchline. Verses 34-35—"Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother.'"

Jesus loved His family members, for sure. Why then didn't He leave the house to see them? For starters, no matter what their motive, He knew they were wrong. Wiersbe's observation is helpful, "If Jesus had yielded to His family, He would have played right into the hands of the opposition. The religious leaders would have said, 'See, He agreed with His family—He needs help! Don't take Jesus of Nazareth too seriously.'"

It's significant that, as far as I can determine, this is the only place in his gospel that Mark shows Mary in action and refers to her as Jesus' mother—and her efforts, though sincere, were misguided. She was a godly woman, indeed. But Mary, like every other descendant of Adam save one (Christ), was a sinner and in need of God's salvation.

Jesus, instead of giving in, made the most of the opportunity to teach a vital, twofold lesson. Here's lesson #1.

A. Your family is important. That's true for many reasons, but here are two.

1. *Jesus had one.* He had an earthly family—a mother, a step-father, four half-brothers (mentioned by name in Mark 6:3: James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon), and at least two half-sisters (again mentioned in Mark 6:3).

By the way, John 7:5 indicates that these siblings did not believe in Him at the time—and would not until after His resurrection.

Your family is important. Reason #1—Jesus had one.

2. *Jesus cared for His.* At the scene of the cross one of the most moving moments is when Jesus makes eye contact with His mother, Mary, then with John the apostle, and commits her future care to John. "Dear woman, here is your son," He said to His mother. And to John, "Here is your mother." And John records, "From that time on, this disciple took her into his home (John 19:27)."

By all means, if you have a family it's God's will for you to care and provide for your family members (1 Tim 5:8). Jesus certainly did.

So there's the first lesson. Your family is important. Some struggle with lesson one. More, in my opinion,

struggle with lesson #2.

B. God's family is more important. It's funny to watch professional football players after they score a touchdown. Here they are, these huge physical specimens, men who make more than the gross national product of some countries, and when the camera zooms in on their face, they smile, wave, and say two words, "Hi mom!"

There's something we know intrinsically. There's nothing more important on this planet than our families. Or is there?

Listen to the Master's words again, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother." With those words Jesus revealed a startling reality. He said there's something on earth more important than the biological family. It's tighter than blood ties. It's something He Himself established by shedding His blood. It's the eternal family.

You say, "Who's in this 'eternal' family?" Jesus made that very clear in verse 35...

1. *To belong, you must do God's will.* Not simply *know* it, but *do* it. What is God's will? Jesus made that clear in His prayer in John 17:6-8: "I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world [a reference to the disciples]. They were yours; you gave them to me [referring to God the Father's electing love] and *they have obeyed your word* [in other words, they were *obedient*; they did God's will]. Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me."

There it is. To do God's will is to believe in the One He sent. It's to receive Him as one's Savior and Lord. It's to choose to turn the controls of one's life over to Him.

Those who have done that are in God's family. Conversely, those who haven't are in another family. "You are of your father, the devil," Jesus told those who refused to believe in Him in John 8:44. Do you desire to be a part of God's eternal family? To belong, you must do God's will. What's more, Jesus taught this...

2. *If you belong, you have a new set of values.* On this day Jesus forsook mother and brothers for the sake of the kingdom. Oh, He didn't abandon them. He just made it clear what came first.

Have you settled that issue? You will spend, if the averages hold, about seventy years with people who share your blood, maybe a little more, maybe less. You should value those people for God gave them to you. But there are other people with whom you will spend eternity. You have blood in common with them, too—the blood of Christ. If we're going to be together for eternity, don't you think we'd better get started now?

Make It Personal: Ask yourself three questions...

1. *Are you in God's family?* To enter God's family you must experience a second birth. You must be born from above. You must be born again (John 3:1ff). When a sinner acknowledges his sin to God and places his trust in Jesus Christ to save him from that sin, the Holy Spirit regenerates that sinner. He produces new life in that sinner. In fact, the Holy Spirit enables that sinner to share in God's nature (2 Pet 1:3-4) so much so that that sinner becomes something very different, a *child of God*, and as such one who now calls on God as *Father* (Rom 8:15-16).

Spiritual birth isn't something we can do for ourselves, nor is it something others can do for us (John 1:11-13). It's God's work. It's a work of His grace. Our part is to believe and receive (Eph 2:8-9). Are you in God's family?

2. *Do you value God's family?* You say, "How does a person show he values God's family?" How do you

show your biological family? It's not by showing up for supper once a week. You spend time with one another. You talk with one another. You help one another. You make sacrifices for the good of one another. It's no different in God's family. Beloved, church isn't where we *go* once a week. It's who we *are*.

Are you in God's family? Do you value God's family? One final question...

3. *Are you sure?*