

Jason Upchurch - Mark 3:20-34 - The Good News that Jesus Plunders Satan

This morning is going to be a lot of fun as we look into several issues all wrapped up together in one passage: We've apologetics which is the defense of the faith. We've got demon possession, binding of Satan, blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, Jesus's family rejecting him.

There's a lot here in this passage. But, the big takeaway here is that if you're doing God's will, you will get persecuted.

2 Tim. 3:16: All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be what? Persecuted.

You know the warning labels that come on packages today? Even the ones that seem obvious? Your coffee is hot? Don't put spray paint cans in microwaves? Everything on the planet is known by the state of California to cause cancer?

There's one warning label on Christianity: If you follow Jesus you will be persecuted. Everyone gets this no exceptions. If you're not getting persecuted just wait a little longer.

I'm a people pleaser by nature. I used to think I could be nice enough, winsome enough, helpful enough that unbelievers wouldn't hate me. Wrong.

Jesus says they hate us because they hate who? Him.

That's why if you're going to follow Jesus you have to count the cost. That's why you have to love Jesus more than your father, mother, brother, children, wife, even your own self. Because it will all be put to the test.

So just mark it down: following Jesus gives you 70-80 years of persecution from everyone you know and love. But get this: a limitless eternity of glory with the triune God. In the end it's always worth it.

But our passage is instructive in preparing for persecution. So I want to have some fun and turn this into an instruction manual for how we prepare for persecution. How can we expect to be prosecuted?

1) Persecution can come through public humiliation. **Read 20**

So Jesus has just selected the 12 apostles to carry on the ministry. And the crowd is still growing. They want more and more. Jesus and the 12 are so constantly surrounded that they can't even eat together because people are cramming in.

And who comes along? Jesus's mom and brothers. And they're not quiet about their disdain for Jesus. They call him out in front of the crowd. **Read 31**

This seems to be a constant theme. They are using public pressure and leverage to get him to stop teaching. This public shaming has happened before, but it is vastly ramped up here because it is his family calling him out. It lends more credence to the claim that he's crazy.

This is huge and something we have to prepare ourselves for. A lot of times we think maybe the kind of persecution we will face is small. Someone will snub us or disown us or send us a nasty text or email.

But can I tell you something? We should all be prepared for our name to go viral in front of the whole world. Jack Phillips - a cake baker from Colorado - wasn't planning on his name being dragged through the mud in front of the whole country. Baronelle Stutzman - the florist from Richland - wasn't planning on her name being all over national news. I used to go by her shop all the time when I lived in Richland. There's another case that just got heard at the Supreme Court about a web site designer arguing that he shouldn't be compelled to make websites advertising gay marriage - so-called gay marriage.

In our culture the woke mob comes for athletes and actors - we see people get cancelled in real time for their faith. But it also comes for people in office buildings and job sites.

We don't need to live in fear but we need to understand that every text we send, email we send, every second we're standing in a store under 24/7 surveillance, a conversation we're having privately that's recorded on video by someone else, could go viral in a minute. And it could go viral simply because we're upholding biblical values.

Our 15 minutes of fame might not be so glamorous. But this is what Jesus calls us to. He's sitting there with his 12 apostles. They're watching this go down, but they're also taking notes. And most of them died a very public death. They were subject to shame and humiliation for following Jesus.

2) Related to that persecution comes through family. Read 21

I won't spend a lot of time on this one because it's an obvious point, but don't assume that you have a special pass with your family just because they're family.

Even the most sympathetic and kind unbelieving family member still fundamentally denies that Jesus is Lord of all.

I mean, Mary gave birth to Jesus. His own conception was a miraculous work. She had the angels tell her that he was the fulfillment of prophecy and the prince of peace and would usher in salvation for all mankind. The very names the angels told her to give him - Jesus, Joshua, meaning God saves and Immanuel meaning God with us - that should have been a hint. You'd think she'd give him some slack.

But here we are, 30 years later, and she and her other sons and daughters are dead set against Jesus.

This doesn't mean that your family has to persecute you or will for sure. We have some unbelieving family that seems happy that we're believers even though they are not. It's an odd situation. But just don't be surprised when they do.

3) Persecution comes by calling godliness crazy. Read 21

Notice the actual charge that Jesus's family makes. He is out of his mind. As believers we are often accused of being just crazy. Our mental faculties are not operating correctly. Now, to be fair, there are some people who claim to be Christians who are kinda loopy.

But for most people it's not their actions that seem crazy, it's our firm convictions.

- Waiting until you're married to have sex? Are you nuts?
- Having more than 2.1 children? Are you trying to ruin the planet?
- Wives submitting to husbands? Are you a neandrathal?
- Marriage is only between one man and one woman for life? Bigot.
- The early Christians were called cannibals because we eat and drink the body and blood of Jesus.
- We were called incestuous because husbands and wives are first and foremost brothers and sisters in the Lord.
- We were called atheists because we only believe there is one God.
- Evolution never happened? Are you nuts?
- Jesus walked on water? The people of Israel ate manna for 40 years?

On and on. See, none of these beliefs are actually crazy. They're all true. But the world has always thought we are crazy. How could we possibly believe these things? Because God has revealed these truths to us in his Word.

Remember in **Acts 26:24** when Paul was giving an account of his testimony before Festus? Festus said Paul was out of his mind.

Paul said “No, I’m speaking true and rational words that you know are true.” Fetus knew what the gospel was, he had heard about Jesus. It wasn’t a secret. He simply refused to believe.

When Jesus was talking about how he is the Good Shepherd in **John 10:20** the people said the same thing. He is out of his mind.

Christians have been called crazy ever since Jesus was called crazy. What was Jesus doing to be called crazy? He was healing people. He was teaching the crowds to live a righteous life following God from their heart. He was appointing the apostles. There was a large crowd.

Nothing really revolutionary all on its own. Now, notice this. It seems that his family wasn’t trying to shut Jesus down because **they** were seeing him and thought he was crazy. It seems that they heard rumors from other people and were acting on the rumors. **Read 20-21**

Did you catch that? When the family heard it. Not heard Jesus, but heard about what he was doing. He’s up in Capernaum. They’re probably still in Nazareth and the rumor mill is flowing to them. And so they make the 20 mile trek to Capernaum to stop him. He’s bringing shame on the family name. Not because they think he is, but because others are and they’re buckling under the pressure.

Listen, there will be times when your family and friends turn against you because of Jesus. And they’re not turning because **they** think you are wrong but because they’re feeling pressure. They don’t want the shame of being associated with you. And you might not know that, and they might not even know that.

David laments in the psalms of then that his close friends have deserted him. Why? Because they’re believing the reports of others.

Will it happen? Maybe or maybe not. But don’t be surprised when it does.

Persecution can come through public humiliation / through family / calling godliness crazy.

4) Persecution can come by calling godliness demonic. **Read 22-23**

Now this might seem similar to what we saw a moment ago: Jesus being called crazy but this is ratcheting the language up to the next level.

When someone is crazy it’s that their mental faculties are not operating correctly for one reason or another. It’s bad but it’s not necessarily evil on its own.

To say someone is being controlled by demons or the devil is to say that they are operating under demonic, evil influence. That’s the difference here. It’s not just that Jesus is demon-possessed, it’s that he is operating on behalf of Beelzebul.

Who is Beelzebul? Well, Jesus will respond and clarify that Beelzebul is another name for Satan. So we know that. Why not just call him that?

Beelzebul was the name the Canaan pagans gave to their god, Baal. Beelzebul means Baal is Prince or Baal is Lord.

A little historical side note: the Jews mocked the name of Beelzebul. They called him Beelzebub: lord of the flies. They call him that in **Joshua 10:6** and **2 Kings 1:2-3**. Some of the ancient copies of Mark actually translate this Beelzebub probably because they knew the history of insulting Canaanite deities.

In any case, they are accusing Jesus of operating with Satanic power and for Satan’s glory. And this is where it gets really weird. They say he’s casting out demons by the prince of demons.

Jesus will debunk the logic of this in just a moment, but when anyone attacks us or Jesus for doing godliness or good works all logic has exited the building. People will say the craziest things to somehow undermine the truth.

We actually see this more often than we probably realize. You know when Christians say something or do something and unbelievers respond with "judge not lest you be judged" or "that doesn't sound like the love of Jesus I know about" or "well, where does Jesus say that??" That's what they're getting at. They're accusing us of being on team Satan. Because what they're trying to do is take the Bible and say that we don't follow it.

Now, in a twist of irony they probably can't even tell you where the verse that says "judge not lest you be judged" is - it's in **Matt 7:1**. And it's probably been a minute since they read about Jesus calling hypocrites sons of hell, or a den of vipers, or liars or sons of Satan. That's all part of the love of Jesus.

But just know persecution will often come in the form of calling us on the side of Satan. This happened all the time to Jesus, and will likely come to us as well.

5) Persecution requires us to do apologetics.

What is apologetics? Apologetics means defense. It doesn't mean to apologize and say we're sorry. It does mean we give a defense for the Christian faith.

Now, apologetics is different than evangelism. They can be similar, but not usually. Evangelism is specifically calling people to turn from their sin and trust in the risen Lord Jesus by explaining the gospel.

Apologetics is answering questions or objections people have to the Christian faith. Many times people know the gospel, but they have other objections. And apologetics seeks to answer those objections.

That's the issue here. The scribes know what Jesus is saying and doing. They're very clear on that, which is why they don't like him. So they launch this attack at him. And what he does is reduce their attack to absurdity. In argumentation it's a *reductio ad absurdum* argument. You take your opponents statement, show the logical conclusion is completely absurd and now their argument is worthless. That's what he does. **Read 23-27**

Now when Mark says Jesus is speaking in a parable, it's not a parable like what we're used to. This is more like an example or a hypothetical.

So what's his argument? It's that if Jesus and Satan are on the same side, then Satan is attacking himself. It'd be like a giant spiritual civil war. Satan's kingdom would be attacking itself. That's ridiculous. Satan isn't going to cast Satan or demons out of other people. Why would he do that?

A kingdom that has civil war going on can't stand. A home where there's constant fighting won't make it. This is the absurdity. **Read 26**

He says that's not happening. Well what is happening? **Read 27**

What does that mean? Here's what he's saying: Oh there's a battle going on alright. Imagine you wanted to rob someone who was a Navy Seal. You wanted to go in and take his TV and his guns and safe. What would you need to do? You'd need to tie him up first. Then you could plunder his stuff.

This is the cool part: Jesus says he's plundering Satan's Kingdom. See there are thousands and thousands of people who are captured by Satan; Satan is the strong man. He's got power. A lot of people don't think Satan is really all that powerful. They're foolish.

Satan prowls like a roaring what? Lion. That's power.

Jude 9 says that when the arch angel - the arch angel - Michael was contending with Satan over the body of Moses he didn't attack Satan directly. That would be foolish. Who did he call on to fight? The Lord. He said the Lord rebuke you!

Remember when the demon possessed guy attacked the false exorcists in the book of Acts (**19:11-20**)? He heart them up so badly they all ran away naked.

The guy with the legion of demons in him was ripping chains apart, ripping shackles apart. Satan doesn't play around. He's the strong man.

And you know what Jesus has done? He's bound him up; hog tied him. As strong as Satan is, Jesus is stronger. And Jesus has bound Satan and bound him for 1 purpose: to plunder Satan. What's Jesus taking? He's taking people. He's plundering Satan of all the people he has held captive and setting them free.

That's what's happening when Jesus casts out demons. That's what happens when the apostles cast out demons. And other people in the early church cast out demons. Maybe there are people who still have that gift, but I've never seen it. But they are being freed from the power of Satan.

It's not just a magic show. Or something to impress people with. It's exerting power over Satan in order to free people from his power.

Now, 2 side notes here.

Eschatology: The other place we see Satan being bound is in **Rev. 20** where it says Satan is bound for 1000 years. I think what John is describing is that Satan is bound now - in this age - until just before Jesus comes back. John says that Satan is bound for exactly one reason: so that he will not deceive the nations.

And what we're seeing is the gospel going forward to the nations. And people will say, "But how can he be bound if he's still active?" My answer is the same way Jesus binds him here but he's still active in the gospels.

Jesus is asked how he casts out demons. Answer? Because Satan is bound. So Satan is bound. But you know what Jesus is going to continue to do throughout the gospel? He's going to keep casting out demons. When Peter rebukes Jesus for talking about his death Jesus says "Get behind me what?" Satan.

So there's a sense in which Satan is bound. His power has been greatly diminished in this age. And yet he's still operating.

Second note is on binding Satan: You'll often hear a lot of talk in charismatic circles about binding Satan. Should we do that or can we do that? Is it right to do that and what does that even look like?

The answer is that nowhere in the Bible are we commanded to bind Satan. We see no one telling Satan he's bound. Or that that's even a thing we do or have the authority to do. Again, what I think we see is that Jesus has bound Satan specifically in the sense that his power over people is severely lessened and his ability to deceive the nations has been taken away. That's why we have brothers and sisters in Christ from every tribe and nation and tongue and language.

But we're never called to do this. Jesus has done it for us. And our mission from now until Jesus returns is to see people plundered out of Satan's control and into the glorious grace of the gospel by preaching the gospel.

6) Persecution means that some will seal their fate. Read 28-30

This is the infamous blasphemy of the Holy Spirit or the unforgivable sin. I've know many people who believed they had committed the unforgivable sin because at some time the reviled Christ or they spoke against him or believed something wrong. That's not blasphemy of the Holy Spirit.

I've also had people say that the only unforgivable sin is unbelief because all unbelievers will be thrown into hell. And while it's true that all unbelievers will be thrown into hell, unbelief itself is not the unforgivable sin. How do we know this? Because unbelief is forgiven by God all the time. Every believer was at one time a what? An unbeliever. The very word means "did not believe."

So what is Jesus saying here? He's saying that these people have crossed a spiritual line. Spiritually they've reached the point of no return where the sin they are committing - whether they know it or not - is so bad and heinous that they will never experience forgiveness.

What did they do? Well, I think the answer is in **Vs. 30. Read**

This is important in this discussion: for they were saying "He has an unclean spirit."

Here's what I think the unpardonable sin is: It's when someone's heart is so hard that when they see an obvious work of the Holy Spirit, a miraculous work that is anti-Satan, their hard-heart attributes it to the Satan. That's blasphemy of the Holy Spirit.

That's what's happening. Jesus is casting out demons. Where is he getting that power? The Holy Spirit who is leading him and guiding him and empowering him. And who are they saying is responsible for these miracles? Satan.

They are taking the work of the Spirit and applying it to Satan.

In that moment they are sealing their fate and they will never be forgiven. That's pretty radical.

So when people ask me if they've committed the unpardonable sin I ask them if they've seen a miraculous work done by the Holy Spirit and then attributed it to Satan. You know what their answer is? No.

Then you haven't committed it. Actually I don't think people who have committed it are probably even concerned that they've committed it. Their hearts are so hard they think they are really defending God.

By the way: It's more implicit than explicit. But you can be forgiven for blasphemies against Jesus who is God and the Father who is God but not against the Spirit. Who does that imply the Spirit is? God.

Blasphemy is defaming God. And here the Spirit is blasphemed when his works are attributed to Satan.

What do we do with this? Know that many times when we are talking to people about Jesus what is happening spiritually is that their fate is sealed. Maybe not in the same way as committing an eternal sin.

But the gospel we gave them and they need to believe to be saved has eternal significance. In fact, the Bible makes it clear that if we tell them the gospel and they reject the gospel their condemnation is worse because they were given more light of truth.

That's a lot about persecution and a lot that might be discouraging. Here's the encouragement: If you hold fast to Jesus and his Word you'll have all the family you'll ever need. **Read 31-34**

Listen, when persecution comes we have to ask ourselves: is it worth it? Following Jesus when everything is easy isn't much of a sacrifice.

We want people to like us, we don't want to be on the outs of our friends group or family and so maybe we're not as bold as we should be or we step back from the truth.

Every time things in life get hard we have to ask ourselves if the end is worth it. Being on a diet: is it worth it? Going to the gym? Saving up for something big? Denying ourselves now for something better.

Persecution is no different. Is the difficulty now worth it in the end?

Jesus is making it clear: our earthly family is nothing compared to your heavenly family. In Christ we may lose everything and everyone we hold dear. And maybe for some of you, when you became a Christian you did lose your friends and family. But what you've gained in Christ is irreplaceable. And it's not primarily that you've gained other people, though you have.

It's primarily that you've gained Christ. **Read 34**

Isn't that interesting? He says that our position in the family all revolves around him. "Here are my mother and my brothers!"

Those who are faithful to the end get Jesus.

See the reward for following Jesus isn't necessarily streets of gold or a mansion or an eternity of permanent vacation. The reward for following Jesus by faith is an eternity of Jesus we will see.

Persecution is just for a moment. Eternity with Jesus is what we look forward to.

Pray