

The Gospel of Mark – The Values and Expectations of Discipleship Mark 3:1-35 (Expanded Sermon Notes)



It's been two years of miracles. Two years of traveling. Two years of teaching. Two years of open criticism. Two years of not getting to have downtime or just some space to breathe. They were overwhelmed and tired. They needed a break, but there didn't seem to be one in sight. Today was the day that broke the camel's back for them. They just wanted a meal. Was that too much to ask for? After all, family was everything, right? And yes, he has done so many amazing things and helped so many people. But, was a quiet meal together too much? And while he was so willing to help others, be present to others, and care for others, why couldn't he care for them? Again, wasn't family everything? Isn't blood thicker than water? The crowds will keep coming, and the pressure of it all has certainly got to him. How did they know this? Well, he's clearly lost his sense of family duty. His priorities and values are all upside down. So, desperate times call for desperate methods. We don't know who they sent, but they needed to send someone who could either bring him to his senses or at least drag him back to the dinner table. So they went out and tried to seize him. But, then he made it clear, yes, his values were upside down for their kingdom, but right-side up for God's. All they wanted was a meal, and they got more than they bargained for.

Mark chapter three opens and closes and is, in its entirety, a dramatic chapter. We see not only the open hostility of the religious leaders but also Jesus' own family needing correction. Mark gives us a snapshot that helps us see Jesus clearly. And what does that clarity teach us about him? Well, simply that **Jesus wants your whole life, not compartments of it.** Why? Because if Jesus is God, then he is worthy. And, if he is worthy, he is to be obeyed.

1. Jesus is God, or he isn't.

- a. Context for this section: The conclusion to the five conflict interactions between Jesus and the Pharisees.
 - i. **Timeline – Do not forget that we are solidly 24+ months into the earthly ministry of Jesus at this point. It can feel like it all just started because Mark is flying through the first two years and just giving us the highlights.**
 - 1. **If you have not done so, here are some key timeline markers to note.**
 - a. 1:16 – Jesus has been in and around Galilee doing ministry for 8-12 months.

- i. **Remember** – When Jesus calls the disciples in 1:17 they have heard lots about him and know who he is. Their faith and obedience is remarkable but not blind.
 - b. 2:1 – 18+ months into Jesus’ earthly ministry.
 - c. 3:1 – 24 months into Jesus’ earthly ministry.
 - d. 4:1 – The beginning of year 3 of Jesus’ earthly ministry.
 - i. That means Mark deals with the final year of Jesus’ ministry in chapters 4-16).
 - ii. Mark **3:1–6** is the climax of the five conflicts. **This time Jesus brings the challenge to the religious leaders.** Sometimes we become so familiar with reading the Gospels that we miss the audacity of what is really happening. One almost feels sorry for the scribes and Pharisees at this point. Imagine the audacity of trying to ambush God incarnate. It is mission impossible.¹
 - iii. It is Mark’s way of indicating that Ch. 3:6, reporting the conspiracy of the Pharisees and the Herodians, points forward to the Passion narrative. The decision to seek Jesus’ death is not the result of a single incident; it is the response to an accumulation of incidents. It is therefore appropriate to see in Ch. 3:6 the conclusion to the whole section on conflict in Galilee (Ch. 2:1–3:6).²
 - 1. **Rewind to last week:** The diversity of Jewish groups in the first-century.
 - 2. The Pharisees were one group within the larger Jewish socio-religious structure of the world that Jesus lived, walked, and did ministry in. Others include:
 - a. **Essenes** were social/religious separatists out in the desert.
 - b. **Zealots** were political insurrectionists. → Simon the Zealot
 - c. **Herodians** were those who were in league with Herod.
 - d. **Sadducees** were a religious-political party with aristocracy roots.
 - 3. **Interestingly, of all these groups, Jesus has the most in common with the Pharisees.** Throughout his ministry Jesus is in a standing debate with Pharisaism, primarily over the issue of *tradition*. The essential difference is especially evident in Mark 7:1–23, in which Jesus accuses the Pharisees of overvaluing oral tradition and undervaluing the *intent* of the law itself.³
 - a. **Why?** Because Jesus wasn’t against tradition. **In his incarnation, he came and was the fulfillment of all the tradition.** Again, they got the logic right all the way up until the last step. The Pharisees put themselves at the center instead of God. And Jesus’ life and approach to tradition challenged that for them. It confronted the identity they had constructed and pointed to the identity God had offered all the way along.
 - b. **Caution – It is really easy for us to pull the rug out from under the Pharisees. But, if we’re willing to take a look in the mirror, we will come to see that we’re more like them than we might think.**
 - b. **The irony of the religious leaders and the unclean spirits.** (vv. 11, 22)
 - i. There are two deeply ironic reflections in this passage. The first that hits us is the answer to who Jesus is. We’ve come out of this larger context of conflict between Jesus

¹ Jason Meyer, *Mark for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, God’s Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2022), 56–57.

² William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), 121–122.

³ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 88.

and the religious leaders where they are openly questioning him, and now are beginning to plot against him. The irony in this larger passage is that the unclean spirits, that is, dark spiritual beings, know exactly who Jesus is, and the religious leaders who should know, think Jesus is a dark spiritual being! Listen to their words...

1. ¹¹ **And whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, “You are the Son of God.”** ¹² **And he strictly ordered them not to make him known.**
 2. ²² **And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, “He is possessed by Beelzebul,” and “by the prince of demons he casts out the demons.”**
- ii. None of this should surprise us to this point. The religious leaders have already been shown to be hard of heart to Jesus and God’s heart. (v.5)
1. Jesus did not mistake the silence of his opponents for consent that the man should be healed. He regarded them with an anger which expressed the anger of God. **In their concern for legal detail they had forgotten the mercy and grace shown by God to man when he made provision for the Sabbath. In the name of piety they had become insensitive both to the purposes of God and to the sufferings of men.** Jesus’ anger was tempered by a godly sorrow for men who could no longer rejoice in the tokens of God’s goodness to men. When Jesus restored the man’s hand he demonstrated what it means “to do good” and “to preserve life” on the Sabbath. Moreover, he provided a sign of the true observance and joy of the Sabbath. As Lord of the Sabbath Jesus delivers both the Sabbath and man from a state of distress.⁴
- iii. **But their claim that Jesus is possessed is deeply ironic and tragic especially when the dark forces testify correctly!**
1. They do not deny Jesus’ power to perform miracles, nor do they accuse him of being an imposter. They indeed recognize his power to perform miracles, but they impugn the *source* of his power, ascribing it to Beelzeboul rather than God. The malicious judgment of the scribes is evidence that faith and unbelief are not the result of proofs.⁵
 - a. **Faith, in other words, is not an automatic, inevitable, or necessary consequence of witnessing the acts of God.**⁶
 - i. **Again, there is a need to cooperate with the Spirit of God.** Their hearts were hard and they missed the work of God.
 2. The scribes bring two separate, but related accusations against Jesus: he is demon-possessed, and he casts out demons through collusion with the prince of the demons.⁷ → Jesus addresses their claims in vv. 24-27 by making it clear that he is the strongman and is plundering the kingdom of this age from Satan.
 3. **They ascribed the work of God to the work of the devil. (vv. 28-30)**

⁴ William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), 123–124.

⁵ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 119.

⁶ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 119.

⁷ William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), 141.

- a. The sin against the Holy Spirit is thus not an indefinable offense against God, **but a specific misjudgment that Jesus is motivated by evil rather than by good, that he is empowered by the devil rather than by God.**⁸
 - b. This is “an eternal sin” (v. 29) since anyone who, willingly or not, cannot distinguish evil from good and good from evil, darkness from light and light from darkness, is beyond the pale of repentance. “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness” (Isa 5:20).⁹
 - c. **Caution** – If you are wondering if you have blasphemed the Holy Spirit, that should tell you that you haven’t. Why? Because your heart is not so hard that you call evil good and good evil.
- c. **Application - He is to be followed, or he isn’t.**
 - i. Mark’s purpose continues to be right in front of us... See Jesus clearly and follow him accordingly. The question, “Who is Jesus?” is not an subjective one, nor is it an academic one, not is it a philosophical one. It includes all of these elements, but it is a question that demands an answer and that answer requires implications to be lived out.
 - ii. Jesus is the Messiah, the one who has wonder working power, the one who teaches with authority unlike anyone else, he is God.
 - 1. Again, if he is who he says he is, then we have a decision to make.
 - 2. What is this decision? → To follow him or to reject him. Those are the only two options.
- d. **Following is a whole-life pursuit.**
 - i. We will see this later in this passage, but to follow Jesus, that is, to be disciple is a whole-life endeavor. This is something we have talked about already in Mark. When Jesus invites the first disciples to follow him, they understand the implications. It is not a half-hearted or compartmentalized pursuit. We will keep hearing this as we go along in Mark.
- e. **Following means I need to acknowledge that I am in need of formation.**
 - i. **What compartments of my life do I not let Jesus into?**
 - 1. That is, what areas of my life do I think my wisdom, creativity, or talent is enough?
 - a. Compartments of our lives – Finances, relationships (romantic and platonic), career, life purpose, identity, etc.
 - 2. **Warning** – We all have these compartments. If you don’t think you do, it means you either have a misunderstanding of what God wants in an area of your life or that you haven’t taken a long enough look in the mirror with the Holy Spirit recently.
 - ii. **How is my mind being renewed and sanctified on the pressing issues of my life?**
 - 1. The question of formation is not just a question of following the rules. It is a question of becoming like Jesus. In order to do this, we must allow our minds to be renewed and sanctified into the image of Jesus.

⁸ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 123.

⁹ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 123.

2. I love the way Paul encourages the church in Philippi, he says, “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.”¹⁰ → That means that they are giving a new mind in Christ.
 - a. Rewind – Do I know God’s truth? Do I trust God’s truth based on God’s character?
- iii. If Jesus is who he says he is, it has implications for our lives. If his character is what it is as on display in the Gospels, then not only is he God, but he is worthy because he is good.

2. Jesus is worthy, or he isn’t.

a. Rewind – Last week we talked about worship.

- i. We all worship something. Why? Because there are things in our lives that we ascribe worth to.
 1. Challenge – We need to be able to differentiate between the ideal self and the actual self.
 2. A church-going person might say, I worship God because I go to church. The action of going to church can seemingly prove that you worship God. But, just because I go to an art museum or gallery, doesn’t mean I am an art critic. Or, that I go to the local butcher shop, doesn’t mean I am a butcher. These are simple pictures that help us get at the heart of worship. That is transformation of values because of an encounter or experience.
- ii. What is worship? → **Worship is** – The act of adoring and praising God, that is, ascribing worth to God as the one who deserves homage and service. The church, which is to be a worshiping community (1 Pet 2:5), expresses its worship corporately and publicly (liturgically) through prayer; through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs; through the reading and exposition of Scripture; through observance of the sacraments; and through individual and corporate living in holiness and service.¹¹
 1. **Worship is, in its most basic sense, to ascribe praise to something that has great worth.**
- iii. What are the things in your life that you ascribe great and evening transformational worth to?
 1. Politics, careers, family, hobbies, relationships, etc.
 2. These can be good things, but when out of focus, they can become functional gods.

b. The religious leaders functional god was their moral performance.

- i. **An Achieved identity** is always constructed on your ability in the face of someone’s failure.
 1. Sports, business, and academics are all in this area. My success or performance is not simply evaluated on its own basis. But its significance is directly compared to those who have done worse or better than myself.
 2. This so often turns into pride and arrogance. → You are only happy because you are better than others.

¹⁰ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Php 2:5.

¹¹ Stanley Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 122.

3. The Pharisees had an achieved identity because they were better than others based on their holding to the law.
- ii. **A received identity** – This is an identity that is established by having the esteem of someone that you esteem.
 1. This is the Bible’s message the whole way through. Adam, Abraham, Moses, Noah, David → Received identity.
 2. The point of the law was to remind us of our need for a received identity and that the God of the universe not only loves us but can redeem us.
 3. This changes everything for us and positions us to be servants.
- c. **Application: He is to be obeyed, or he isn’t. → That is, if Jesus is worthy of following, then his values are to be at the center of my life. Not compartmentalized.**
 - i. The second contrast in this passage comes from a misunderstanding by Jesus’ own family. They think he’s lost it. He’s gone too far. All of this has been too much on him and he’s cracked. Again, if we put ourselves in their shoes, this all must have been so tough on them. The crowds won’t stop coming. The heat in the kitchen is getting hotter as the religious leaders now plot against Jesus. The understanding is in fact, understandable. But, it comes from a misunderstanding of Jesus’ values. They want him to lay low, cut it out for a while, and come to his senses. He is resilient in the face of the challenges to be obedient to the Father. Consider their words...
 1. ²⁰**Then he went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat.** ²¹**And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, “He is out of his mind.”**¹²
 - a. Mark concluded the preceding story on the note of Judas’s betrayal (v. 19). He now describes, if not a betrayal, a grievous misunderstanding within Jesus’ inner circle. With typical economy of language Mark returns the scene to “a house.” The only house identified in the Gospel thus far has been Peter’s house in Capernaum (1:29), the ostensible site of the healing of the paralytic (2:1–12). The same house may be intended here. Jesus’ magnetism attracts people in great throngs. As in the story of the healing of the paralytic, the house is so crowded that Jesus and the disciples are “not even able to eat.” **The crowd is again an obstacle rather than an asset to Jesus’ mission.**¹³
 2. ³³**And he answered them, “Who are my mother and my brothers?”** ³⁴**And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers!** ³⁵**For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.**”¹⁴
 - a. There is, so to speak, no proxy membership in God’s kingdom. If “those around Jesus” (v. 21), even the holy family, are placed under question, then Mark places under question all who grow up amid the trappings of Christianity, whether through baptism, Christian homes, confirmation, church attendance, or charitable giving. Anyone can be an insider who

¹² *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mk 3:20–21.

¹³ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 118.

¹⁴ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mk 3:33–35.

sits at Jesus' feet and does the will of his Father, and no one can be an insider who does not.¹⁵

d. **Do we compartmentalize Jesus' values?**

i. **What values of Jesus just seem "out of touch" for our world?**

1. Really sit with this question. Jesus' own family thought that his values of ministry and obedience were just "too much" in contrast to the values of their society.
 - a. Jesus just makes matters worse. He slices through the whole traditional structure in one clean cut. He has a different vocation, a different mission, and it involves breaking hallowed family ties. God is doing the unthinkable: he is starting a new family, a new holy people, and is doing so without regard for ordinary human family bonds. Unless you read verses 34 and 35 as deeply shocking, you haven't got the message.¹⁶
2. Perhaps, we need to also ask, where does the Bible give actual support for the values that I hold in my life?
 - a. If the Bible is to be our authority then we are to run everything through it. The most deceitful ideas are the ones that have just enough truth to be believable.
 - b. Karl Barth once said, "**Take your Bible and take your newspaper, and read both. But, interpret newspapers from your Bible.**"¹⁷ – Karl Barth

ii. **When the world's wisdom offers shortcut answers, we are not to be persuaded by them.**

1. That is what Dr. Barth is getting at. How many compartments in our lives do we submit to the world's wisdom because it offers us an easier answer? Or an answer that seems to fit our fleshly preferences and desires more readily?

e. **Resiliency – A key ingredient in obedience.**

i. **What does resiliency look like in my spiritual life?**

1. Again, the misunderstanding is understandable. But Jesus is clear, to love God is to follow God. And to follow God is to do so with resiliency not just when it is convenient or fits my perspective.
2. Resiliency looks like being committed to doing the next right Godly thing. → Resilient people are not perfect people. But they are the family of Jesus. Because they have allowed the values of Jesus to form their hearts and minds and then shape their actions.

ii. **A key reminder - Discipleship was never a promise to an easy life. → It was a promise to an abundant life and offers deeper answers to life's big questions.**

1. But, we'll never experience the fullness of discipleship if we keep compartmentalizing Jesus.

¹⁵ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 125.

¹⁶ Tom Wright, *Mark for Everyone* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 40.

¹⁷ Karl Barth via Time Magazine, May 1, 1966.