

The Gospel According to Mark

Lesson 3

Mark 3:1 – Mark 4:20

More than two years have transpired in the earthly ministry of the Lord. Mark, as well as Matthew (Levi the tax collector), and Luke, focus the bulk of their record on the events of the last six to eight months of Jesus' ministry. By this time the Pharisees and priests need more support in their efforts to stop the Lord's ministry, so they enlist a political group known as the Herodians.

Healing the withered hand on the Sabbath

Mark 3: ¹And He entered again into a synagogue; and a man was there with a withered hand. ²And they were watching Him *to see* if He would heal him on the Sabbath, in order that they might accuse Him. ³And He said to the man with the withered hand, "*Rise and come forward!*" ⁴And He said to them, "*Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save a life or to kill?*" But they kept silent. ⁵And after looking around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, He said to the man, "*Stretch out your hand.*" And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored. ⁶And the Pharisees went out and immediately *began* taking counsel with the Herodians against Him, *as to* how they might destroy Him.

The Pharisees' strict obedience to the Jewish laws and traditions set them at odds with the Lord's ministry, specifically His healings on the Sabbath. They cannot get past their ingrained rules to see the wonderfulness of the Lord's work. The Lord has already defused the influence of the Pharisees among the people and they have discerned that they will need the help of a Roman political group to bring an end to this opposition to their way of life and worship. They counsel with the Herodians and enlist their help to destroy the Lord. Who were the Herodians? Mark Antony made Herod the tetrarch of Judea in BC 40. Soon afterwards the Roman senate made him king of Judea, or as the Bible says, the king of the Jews. Like every political leader today, Herod had a group of people, the Herodians, who followed and supported his ideas and leadership style. The report of the Pharisees troubles this political party and they join the campaign to destroy Jesus. They see Jesus as a threat to the future of their political party, especially since for years they have been engaged in a legal courtship with Rome to regain some of their lost political power in the region. From this point on, the religious powerhouse of the Sanhedrin will be joined by the political powerhouse of the government to entrap the Lord and put Him to death. In the midst of such opposition, the Lord carefully designs His ministry to minister to the people, to continue to enrage His opponents, and to fulfill His work on earth.

To the Sea of Galilee with all His followers

Mark 3: ⁷And Jesus withdrew to the sea with His disciples; and a great multitude from Galilee followed; and *also* from Judea, ⁸and from Jerusalem, and from Idumea, and beyond the Jordan, and the vicinity of Tyre and Sidon, a great multitude heard of all that He was doing and came to Him.

At the Sea of Galilee the crowd gathers, constantly following our miracle-working Lord wherever He goes. From 60 miles north to 170 miles south of the Sea of Galilee, the impact of the Lord's ministry compels the people to face all the trials and tribulations of traveling in that day, just to be near Him. Our generation has never experienced the hope that they felt in those days; if they can just to be near Him, they know they can be healed. For centuries, explorers and scientists have sought the fountain of youth and the miracle working potions that will give immortality on earth, but they all have failed. When these people go to see Jesus to be healed of their earthly ailments, they are healed. But Jesus will do more than heal them; He will speak to them about the eternal will of God.

The following chart shows the distance people traveled to be with Jesus.

Miles from Galilee to:

The center of:	Judea	Jerusalem	Idumea	Tyre	Sidon
	120 miles	90 miles	170 miles	40 miles	60 miles

The need for a boat

Mark 3: 9 And He told His disciples that a boat should stand ready for Him because of the multitude, in order that they might not crowd Him; **10** for He had healed many, with the result that all those who had afflictions pressed about Him in order to touch Him.

The boat stands ready as a tool to help the Lord meet the needs of the people. The Lord stays with the people on the seashore because they need Him to heal them. The disciples keep the boat near, and as He moves around the seashore to attend to the needs of the massive crowd, the boat follows in the water, always ready if He needs it. When He has healed all the people in one area, He will undoubtedly use the boat to move down the shoreline to meet the needs of those awaiting His touch. As He moves through the crowd, demon-possessed people are there too. Why are they there? Could it be that the demons cannot possess the whole being of the person? Could it be that that person still has the power to desire healing and removal of the demon from his life? For whatever reason, the crowd that day and every day includes the demon-possessed.

Unclean spirits knew Jesus as the Son of God

Mark 3: 11 And whenever the unclean spirits beheld Him, they would fall down before Him and cry out, saying, "You are the Son of God!" **12** And He earnestly warned them not to make Him known.

The public always dismisses the testimony of the demon-possessed because they are viewed as crazy. In order to understand the significance of this passage, we must understand what is taking place at the Sea of Galilee. Thousands have gathered there to be healed. As Jesus makes His way through the crowd, the demon-possessed people fall to their knees and proclaim His Godship. The demons are telling the truth; He is God, but no one accepts the testimony of a crazy person, not even today. Testimonies like this add nothing to the meaningfulness of the wondrous work of the Lord; in fact, it brings great distraction to this special time. As before in Mark 1:23-27, the Lord instructs the demon-possessed to be quiet and not proclaim

to the crowd that He is the Son of God. Jesus does not want this testimony because it will seize the attention of the naysayers and give them opportunity to continue their criticism. The Lord addresses the problem and then moves on to the mountainside to make a monumental announcement that will actually help with the problem of demon-possession.

The appointment of the twelve apostles

Mark 3: ¹³And He went up to the mountain and summoned those whom He Himself wanted, and they came to Him. ¹⁴And He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him, and that He might send them out to preach, ¹⁵and to have authority to cast out the demons. ¹⁶And He appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom He gave the name Peter), ¹⁷and James, the son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James (to them He gave the name Boanerges, which means, "Sons of Thunder"); ¹⁸and Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Zealot; ¹⁹and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him.

For the purpose of the Roman reader, Mark forgoes the details of this special ceremony, but they can be found in Luke 6 and Matthew 10. On the mountainside, the Lord calls out the names of twelve men from among the thousands of people, and He gathers them in a small group halfway down the mountain. There the Lord appoints the twelve as His apostles or the Lord's messengers. He gives them three purposes for their inclusion as apostles: 1) to be with Him, 2) to be sent out by Him, and 3) to have the authority to cast out demons. As the demon-possessed try to approach Jesus in the midst of the crowd, the apostles can handle them before they get to Him. Although we have no proof that any apostle ever cast out a demon in the presence of the Lord, the Roman reader would draw that inference from the context of this passage. Whether they use the authority or not, the apostles are granted that ability on that day as the Lord selects them as apostles. From the mountainside, Jesus travels, with the crowd following Him, to his boyhood home in Capernaum.

At His home

Mark 3: ²⁰And He came home, and the multitude gathered again, to such an extent that they could not even eat a meal. ²¹And when His own people heard of this, they went out to take custody of Him; for they were saying, "He has lost His senses."

As Jesus and His disciples arrive at Peter's home to eat a meal, the crowd continues to gather in great numbers around the Lord, both inside and out. The eating of a meal becomes impossible. While Jesus is there, His Jewish friends and relatives come to rescue Him from the dilemma. They have heard the report that He has lost His senses, that demons control Him and give Him His power. Surely they did not believe that Jesus had lost His senses. They knew that He could not be involved with casting out demons by the power of the chief demon Beelzebub; nevertheless, the rabbis have propagated this story to the people. In Peter's home the scribes seek to discredit Him in the eyes of the people.

Accused of casting out demons by Beelzebul

Mark 3: 22 And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons." **23** And He called them to Himself and began speaking to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? **24** And if a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. **25** And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. **26** And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but he is finished! **27** But no one can enter the strong man's house and plunder his property unless he first binds the strong man, and then he will plunder his house. **28** Truly I say to you, all sins shall be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they utter; **29** but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin" -- **30** because they were saying, "He has an unclean spirit."

After gathering all the scribes around Him in the room, He begins with a parable to defend Himself against the rumor they are spreading. The Lord uses many parables to compare points of view and bring new understanding to a subject. Most of the Lord's parables use some sort of word picture to disclose His important point. A parable will present one important or main point. Unlike an allegory, the parable has no coded messages written in it.

In this parable, Jesus points out how ludicrous it is to even present the idea that He casts out demons by the power of the prince of demons. No general of any army will divide his troops into two groups and have them fight each other, expecting to win a war by fighting themselves rather than the enemy. Why would Satan divide his kingdom by defeating his own demons? The demons are the tools by which Satan attempts to win his battles. Why would Satan ransack his own house? He would first have to tie up his strong demons in order to plunder them, an act which makes no sense whatsoever; yet it was the illogical "logic" of the scribes and Pharisees.

The scribes and Pharisees have committed the unpardonable sin; they have denied the testimony of the Holy Spirit concerning Jesus. He is not Satan, He does not work for Satan, and no one should ever give Satan the credit for the wondrous work of the Lord. The Holy Spirit declares to the world that Jesus is the Lord, and He calls men to accept Him as their Savior. If a person rejects the call of the Holy Spirit, he has committed the unpardonable sin. If he dies without the Lord, eternal doom and eternal punishment are his only reward for his efforts in this life. The Lord cannot have a demon within Him because He is the righteous God of all creation. However, as the incarnate Jesus on earth, He still has a mother and brothers who have probably heard the reports, and they are concerned about Him and His wellbeing.

His family comes to take Him home

Mark 3: 31 And His mother and His brothers arrived, and standing outside they sent word to Him, and called Him. **32** And a multitude was sitting around Him, and they said to Him, "Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are outside looking for You." **33** And answering them, He said, "Who are My mother and My

brothers?" 34 And looking about on those who were sitting around Him, He said, "Behold, My mother and My brothers! 35 "For whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother."

When Mary and her sons arrive at Peter's house, the crowds are pouring out the doors and windows. People gather on the outside trying to hear the words of the Lord. Every inch of the house is filled with people, probably surrounding the apostles who are forming a ring around the Lord. The family does not disclose why they want to see the Lord; they just send the word that they want to speak with Him.

His reaction to the call seems strange to readers today. Because of the accusations concerning Jesus and Beelzebub, our immediate thought is that the brother's words are hostile and we interpret the Lord's words with a hostile tone. But at this point in the Lord's earthly ministry, His answer is most likely filled with the idea of kindness and inclusion. About a year and a half remains in His earthly work and His words "For whoever does the will of God," are My family, bring great comfort. He does not exclude His own blood family; He just enlarges it to include all His followers.

What happens to His mother and brothers? We do not really know. Perhaps they return to their home. Perhaps they stay to listen to Him speak. Mark simply does not tell us the events of the rest of this evening; rather, he turns our attention to the Lord's teaching at the Sea of Galilee on another day.

Teaching from the boat on the Sea of Galilee – the parable of the sower

Mark 4: 1 And He began to teach again by the sea. And such a very great multitude gathered to Him that He got into a boat in the sea and sat down; and the whole multitude was by the sea on the land. 2 And He was teaching them many things in parables, and was saying to them in His teaching, 3 "Listen to this! Behold, the sower went out to sow; 4 and it came about that as he was sowing, some seed fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate it up. 5 And other seed fell on the rocky ground where it did not have much soil; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of soil. 6 And after the sun had risen, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away. 7 And other seed fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked it, and it yielded no crop. 8 And other seeds fell into the good soil and as they grew up and increased, they yielded a crop and produced thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold." 9 And He was saying, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

Parables cause a person to think and this is why the Lord uses them. But parables are also used because the stubborn and prejudiced people will fail to get the main point of the stories. With this parable, like each of the Lord's parables, we must be extremely careful not to read something into it that is not intended. Those who are attentive and really want to learn more of His wisdom will glean some insight. Those who are there to hear something that they can use against Him understand nothing. Sadly, the disciples and the apostles do not understand the simple truth in this parable, and they have to ask Him about it later when He is finally alone with them.

The meaning of the parable of the sower

Mark 4: ¹⁰And as soon as He was alone, His followers, along with the twelve, began asking Him *about* the parables. ¹¹And He was saying to them, "To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God; but those who are outside get everything in parables, ¹²in order that WHILE SEEING, THEY MAY SEE AND NOT PERCEIVE; AND WHILE HEARING, THEY MAY HEAR AND NOT UNDERSTAND LEST THEY RETURN AND BE FORGIVEN." ¹³And He said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? And how will you understand all the parables? ¹⁴"The sower sows the word. ¹⁵"And these are the ones who are beside the road where the word is sown; and when they hear, immediately Satan comes and takes away the word which has been sown in them. ¹⁶"And in a similar way these are the ones on whom seed was sown on the rocky *places*, who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy; ¹⁷and they have no *firm* root in themselves, but are *only* temporary; then, when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they fall away. ¹⁸"And others are the ones on whom seed was sown among the thorns; these are the ones who have heard the word, ¹⁹and the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. ²⁰"And those are the ones on whom seed was sown on the good soil; and they hear the word and accept it, and bear fruit, thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold."

Those who are asking Him to explain the meaning of the parable are insiders who have every right to understand its message. Bystanders could not have grasped the meaning of the parable because it is spiritual; it is for those who have allowed the Holy Spirit to open their ears. The Lord is taking His followers into the secrets of His eternal kingdom. They will understand only a little of the message for now, but as they grow, they will understand more. The Lord's main point is to explain to His followers that there are four different reactions to the gospel message.

- Satan has stolen the hearts of the people in this first group, possibly by the distraction of others trying to leave a service when the call is being presented, possibly by an untruthful report about a believer who is sharing the message, or even by someone's attempt to keep a person from going to the place where the message is shared.
- The second are people hardened by the world and worldly needs who act as if they will accept the gospel message as long as things are going well, but when things go astray, they return to their old worldly ways.
- The third group of people attempt to live in both worlds, the religious and the worldly, never attempting to leave the world, never changing their life-styles, never seeking purity, always choking out God's gospel by the ways of the world.
- The fourth group soaks in all that the gospel holds for them, benefiting greatly from its message. Of all the four kinds of hearers, only this group is truly saved.