

8.9.09 / Mark 3:22-35

This passage follows directly after the passage from last week. It contains one of the more worrisome passages in Scripture, and deserves some serious consideration.

What did it mean for those who first heard it?

Who is Beelzebul/Beelzebub? Clearly “the prince of demons”. The name itself likely comes from an old Philistine god (see “How Do We Know?”), but by this time it is used for the devil.

It is also worth noting that the actual phrase in the original Greek is not “possessed by Beelzebul” but “has Beelzebul”. The King James actually renders this directly (“hath Beelzebub”), but most translations use the possession terminology. Because the term “possession” is sometimes a starting point for discussions of demonic effects on people it is worth pointing out this distinction.

There is some debate about Jesus’ brothers. This debate is found mostly in non-Protestant churches, and as such has been relegated to “How Do We Know?”.

1) Why do the scribes think Jesus is playing for the wrong supernatural team? In what worldview does their statement make sense (i.e., put yourself in their heads for a moment)? What does their accusation mean, in concrete terms?

2) As a first-century bystander how would this claim look? Would it be plausible? What is the claim trying to explain away?

3) Jesus’ answer is relatively straightforward. However, in verse 26 Jesus says, “And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end.” If Satan is coming to an end what does that mean? Jesus seems to be implying that even if he were working for Satan his ministry means Satan is doomed – how does that response function? Where are the scribes left by this response?

4) Who is the strong man in verse 27?

5) What is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit? Verse 30 connects this idea to “they were saying he had an unclean spirit”. Does this clarify what is meant by blasphemy against the Holy Spirit? Does this explain why it is an “eternal sin”?

6) One of the things nobody seems to question in this passage is that Jesus’ work harms the dominion of Satan. It’s foundational to Jesus’ argument about a house divided. How does everyone know this? What sort of measurement are they using to determine this?

7) What is it that Jesus’ relatives want?

8) What does Jesus mean when he says, “Here are my mother and my brothers”? What does this sort of adoption language mean?

9) There are fairly clearly stated criteria for being Jesus’ relative. How, if at all, are these criteria related to the ones that separate, in the previous story, the works of God and the works of Satan (as per question 6)?

What does it mean in our current context?

Many of this week’s in context questions extend logically into the present age. These questions below attempt to help that happen, but it’s also quite possible to simply push some of the questions above a bit further.

1) What's happened to Satan? Jesus points out that even under the scribes' claims Satan is "coming to an end". What's happened since? What is Satan doing these days? Do we still believe he's doing much of anything?

2) If we've decided (per question 5 above) what blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is, what does it look like today? Maybe you've heard of "The Blasphemy Challenge." Is this what it looks like? If it's more subtle than that, how do we avoid it, or is it actually blindingly obvious?

3) How do we recognize, and differentiate, the works of God and the works of Satan? Is this important to do? Is this done through doctrine, emotions, impact assessments, or what? It may be helpful to name specific instances in which one has recognized the work of God and the work of Satan clearly.

4) Have we experienced rejection because of following Jesus? How do we deal with this? Jesus says he's adopted people as relatives – so for those who do the will of God, are we related now? What does this mean for community?

Weekly Questions to Ask the Group

What is one characteristic of God that you notice in this passage that you've never noticed before?
How does this passage show you where your life needs correcting?