



The Gospel of Mark

A Living Word Independent Bible Study



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Part 8

Mark 3:20-35

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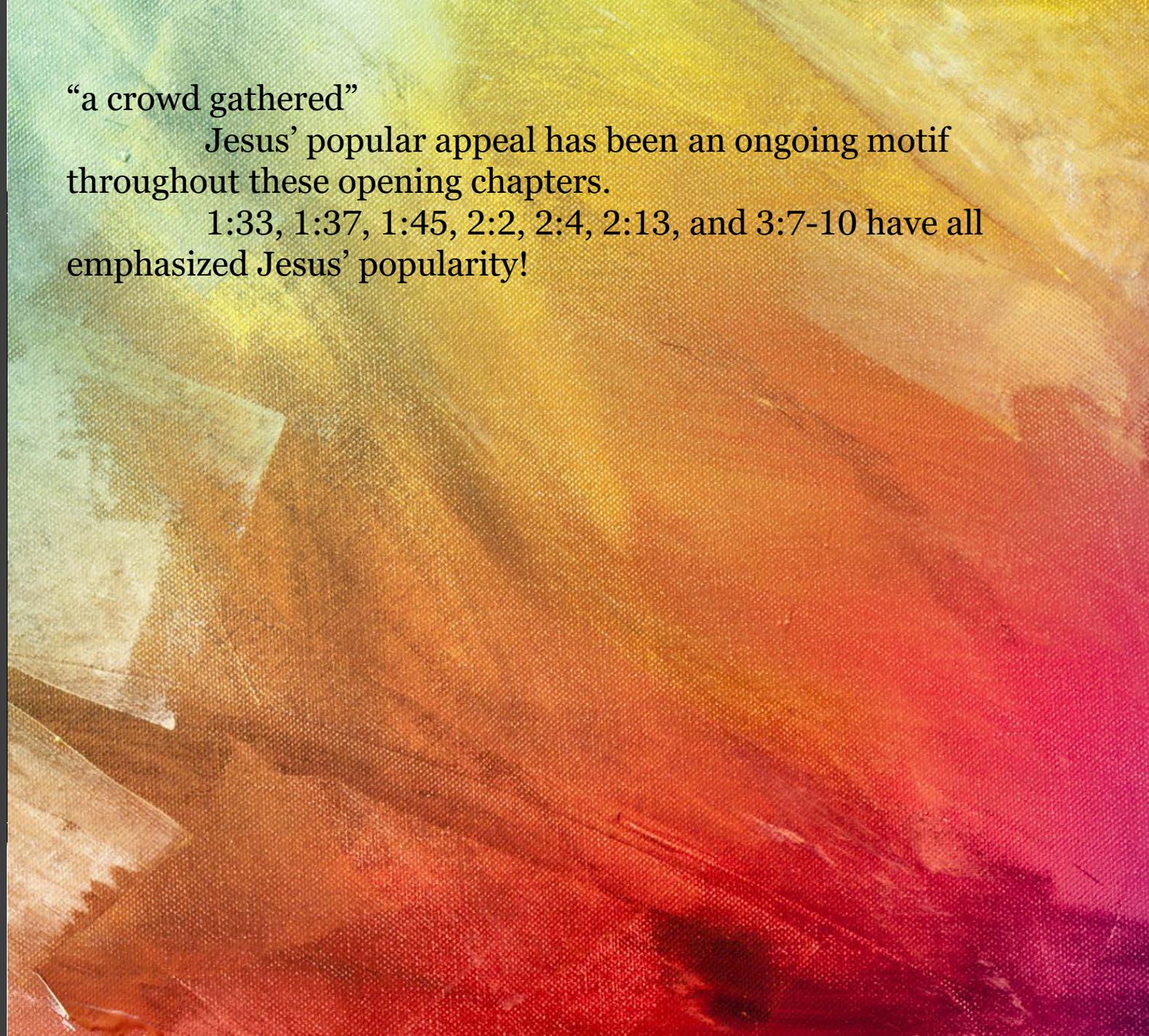
Mark 3:20 (NIV)

Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat.

“a crowd gathered”

Jesus’ popular appeal has been an ongoing motif throughout these opening chapters.

1:33, 1:37, 1:45, 2:2, 2:4, 2:13, and 3:7-10 have all emphasized Jesus’ popularity!



Mark 3:21 (NIV)

When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, “He is out of his mind.”

There is a definite “sandwich structure” to the section of Mark we are looking at in this lesson:

- Jesus’ family accuses Jesus
- The scribes accuse Jesus
- Jesus answers the scribes
- Jesus answers his family

The best translation of this verse is “When his family heard it, they went out to seize him.”

The “they” is sometimes interpreted as referring to the disciples or others from the crowd, as opposed to the family, but their arrival in 3:31 leads most scholars to dispute this interpretation.

Mark 3:21 (NIV)

When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, “He is out of his mind.”

“his family”

According to 3:31 ahead, this is Jesus’ mother and brothers.

We should note that by early church and Roman Catholic tradition, “brothers” in that verse means “half-brothers” – perhaps from an earlier, deceased wife of Joseph, or perhaps cousins.

There is theological concern within Roman Catholicism to preserve the perpetual virginity of Mary.

The word used here, though, is typically used to refer to biological brothers.

It appears Jesus’ family is NOT following him at this point. Their motives could have been good – trying to rescue him from others, or from himself ... but they are clearly in opposition to Jesus in this scene.

“heard about this”

That is, that Jesus is in town again.

“to take charge of him”

This is a strong verb, also used in 6:17 and 12:12, where it is translated “arrest”.

“out of his mind”

They think Jesus has actually gone mad!

Mark 3:22 (NIV)

And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, “He is possessed by Beelzebub! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons.”

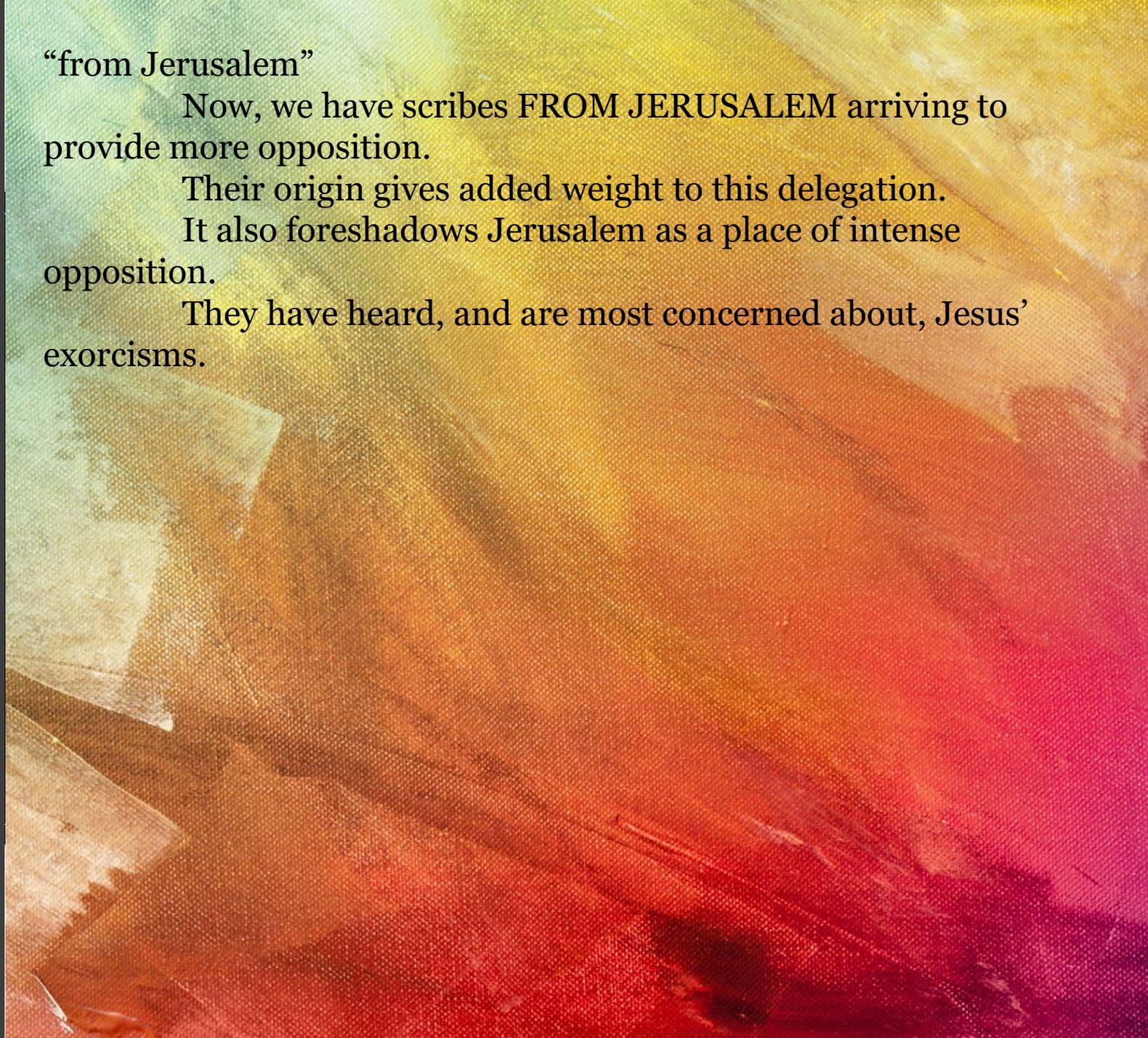
“from Jerusalem”

Now, we have scribes FROM JERUSALEM arriving to provide more opposition.

Their origin gives added weight to this delegation.

It also foreshadows Jerusalem as a place of intense opposition.

They have heard, and are most concerned about, Jesus' exorcisms.



Mark 3:22 (NIV)

And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, “He is possessed by Beelzebub! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons.”

“Beelzebub”

Baal-Zebul was a pagan deity in the times of Elijah. The word was intentionally corrupted in 2 Kings to “Baal-Zebub”

2 Kings 1:2 – “Now Ahaziah had fallen through the lattice of his upper room in Samaria and injured himself. So he sent messengers, saying to them, ‘Go and consult Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron, to see if I will recover from this injury.’”

Some English translations of Mark (like the NIV to the left) continue to use THIS spelling, with the “b” at the end, even though the Greek as the “l” at the end as in the actual name.

“Baal-Zebul” translated into “Lord of the heavenly house”

“Baal-Zebub” translated into “Lord of the flies” or “Lord of the dungheap”

The Jews in Jesus’ day believed that pagan gods were actual demons – so to say that Jesus is possessed by Beelzebub is to say he is under the control of a demonic pagan god.

It also appears that “Beelzebub” may have become a synonym for “Satan”.

Mark 3:22 (NIV)

And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, “He is possessed by Beelzebub! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons.”

“prince of demons”

This IS Satan, the head of all demons.

There is some evidence the Jews in Jesus’ day also believed in a hierarchy of demons – so Satan, “prince of demons” – would be “in charge” of Beelzebub.

It is also possible that Beelzebub is simply being used as a synonym for “Satan”, and only one being is referred to here, in control of Jesus.

The accusation is, essentially, “You’re on Satan’s side.” Jesus’ response takes the form of logic and reason!

Mark 3:23 (NIV)

So Jesus called them and spoke to them in parables: “How can Satan drive out Satan?”

“parables”

The word is from the Greek for “thrown along side of”.

These sayings could take the form of riddles, metaphors, similes, and/or allegories.

“How can Satan drive out Satan?”

The accusation makes no sense to Jesus. It is logically inconsistent!

Jesus’ argument is essentially:

Satan’s kingdom exists – we see it all around us. If it were in a civil war, it would not exist.

Mark 3:24-26

(NIV)

“If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come.”

“kingdom ... house ... Satan”

Jesus says the principle is true both at the macro, or kingdom level, and at the micro, or house level ... and therefore applies to Satan as well.

Not only that, but if by driving out demons, Satan’s kingdom HAS fallen, then Jesus’ ministry of exorcism HAS, in fact, defeated Satan!

Mark 3:27 (NIV)

“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.”

“strong man’s house”

This is Jesus’ second explanation, also given in parable form.

The exorcisms are the result of Satan being bound. Having been bound, he is able to be defeated by the forces of good.

Jesus is stronger than Satan and is liberating his prisoners.

Mark 3:28-29 (NIV)

“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.”

“I tell you the truth”

This is a common formula in Mark’s Gospel – used again in 8:12, 9:1, 9:41, 10:15, 10:29, and others.

In Greek, the words are “Amen, I say to you”.

We see this phrase **EXCLUSIVELY** on the lips of Jesus in the Bible.

“all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven”

This is **GOOD NEWS!**

It is an unparalleled declaration of total forgiveness!

This includes **SIN** (against humans) and **BLASPHEMY** (against God) – it is comprehensive!

“blasphemes against the Holy Spirit”

But wait!

There **IS** an unforgivable sin!

At first, this seems to contradict the earlier statement.

There has been much debate through the centuries about what constitutes blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

Let’s search for an answer in the text itself ...

Mark 3:30 (NIV)

He said this because they were saying, “He has an evil spirit.”

“He said this because ...”

These words imply we should look at this verse FIRST for an explanation of Jesus’ words!

What clues do we have in the text and in this verse?

Scripture.

Scribes were highly educated, well versed in

was possessed.

They were repeating the accusation that Jesus

verdict on Jesus.

They were publicly declaring this as a final

order to convince others that this accusation was true.

They were saying that someone who was perfectly holy (Jesus) was in fact perfectly unholy, controlled by Satan.

“bad”

They were reversing morality by calling “good”

Thus, they were slandering Jesus, who was filled with and empowered by the Holy Spirit – the holiest of anyone.

Mark 3:30 (NIV)

He said this because they were saying, “He has an evil spirit.”

All of this implies:

The ultimate, unforgivable, sin is attributing the work of the Holy Spirit through Jesus to demonic forces.

Even here, this is a WARNING – even the scribes making this charge could reverse their course of action and be forgiven.

It would be difficult for any of us to duplicate this sin – to go forward with an air of final authority declaring that holiness is unholy.

If anyone worries that they have committed this sin, they most likely have not – because their worry is a sign that God is drawing them toward forgiveness, renewal, and repentance!

Mark 3:31 (NIV)

Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him.

Remember – we are still in the middle of the “sandwich structure” of 3:20-34!

“Jesus' mother and brothers arrived”

This verse begins the last part of the “sandwich” – it is the second half of the “family” reference from verses 20-21, and the family's charges against Jesus.

They are drawn as “outsiders” here, not “insiders”.

We don't know where they have been while others have been flocking to Jesus.

And it can make us uncomfortable that his family are antagonists here.

“Standing outside”

Note where the family is – in deliberate contrast to those “sitting around him” we will see in verse 32 next.

Of course, this IS a very crowded scene according to verse 20, so perhaps they simply couldn't get inside.

“to call him”

In 3:13, Jesus “calls” others to him – here, his family tries to “call” Jesus to them.

Mark 3:32-34

(NIV)

A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, “Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.” “Who are my mother and my brothers?” he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, “Here are my mother and my brothers!”

“they told him”

It is the CROWD that passes the message to Jesus.

“Who are my mother and my brothers?”

Again, Jesus responds to a question with a question – thus creating an opportunity to teach.

“those seated in a circle around him”

Again, note the clear distinction between those encircling Jesus, and those “outside” his “circle”.

“Here are my mother and my brothers”

Note that Jesus is looking at those seated IN THE CIRCLE as he responds.

Literally, this is: “Look! My mother and my brothers!” - there is no verb in the exclamation.

Jesus identifies “family” based on the response to him and his teaching, rather than on natural kinship.

Mark 3:35 (NIV)

“Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.”

“whoever does God’s will”

ANYONE who says “yes” to God’s will is part of Jesus’ family.

This INCLUDES the possibility of Jesus’ NATURAL family!

Clinging to God’s will is the way to intimacy, or being family with, Jesus.

Remember, family terms like “brother/sister” became the norm in the church, the “family of God”.

It is open to everyone, everywhere.

The concept of a new “family” of believers COULD also reference the possibility, seen in all the Gospels, that discipleship might require the disavowal of natural family ties ... but there is, reassuringly, a NEW family.

Looking at the entire “sandwich” of this lesson:

Presuming closeness to Jesus based on your religious status, like the scribes, could make you an OUTSIDER.

But also, presuming closeness to Jesus on the basis of birth, or kinship, could also make you an OUTSIDER.

This theme of outsiders and insiders will be further developed in the passages that follow in Mark’s Gospel.



Bibliography

The following materials have been used as sources for this Bible study:

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