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Mark 3:20-35 Where does Jesus' Power come from?

Discussion: Have you ever had to take a stand for something about which you had very strong feelings or beliefs, to defend a position knowing that you were absolutely right?

Mark 3

Jesus Accused by His Family & Teachers of the Law
20 Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. **21** When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind."

Matthew 12

Jesus and Beelzebul
22 Then they brought him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see. **23** All the people were astonished and said, "Could this be the Son of David?"

Mark 3	Matthew 12	Luke 11
22 And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, "He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons."	24 But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons."	15 But some of them said, "By Beelzebul, the prince of demons, he is driving out demons."
23 So Jesus called them over to him and began to speak to them in parables: "How can Satan drive out Satan? 24 If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25 If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. 26 And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come.	25 Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand. 26 If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand?"	17 Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them: "Any kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and a house divided against itself will fall. 18 If Satan is divided against himself, how can his kingdom stand?"
27 In fact, no one can enter a strong man's house without first tying him up. Then he can plunder the strong man's house.	29 "Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can plunder his house.	21 "When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. 22 But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armour in which the man trusted and divides up his plunder.

Bible Study of Mark's Gospel

Mark 3	Matthew 12	Luke 12
28 Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter,	31 And so I tell you, every kind of sin and slander can be forgiven,	8 "I tell you, whoever publicly acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man will also acknowledge before the angels of God. 9 But whoever disowns me before others will be disowned before the angels of God.
	but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. 32 Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven,	10 And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven,
29 but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven;	but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven,	but anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.
they are guilty of an eternal sin." 30 He said this because they were saying, "He has an impure spirit."	either in this age or in the age to come.	

Mark 3	Matthew 12	Luke 8
31 Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. 32 A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you."	<i>Jesus' Mother and Brothers</i> 46 While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. 47 Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you."	<i>Jesus' Mother and Brothers</i> 19 Now Jesus' mother and brothers came to see him, but they were not able to get near him because of the crowd. 20 Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you."
33 "Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked. 34 Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers!"	48 He replied to him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" 49 Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers.	
35 Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."	50 For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."	21 He replied, "My mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice."

The “Mark Sandwich”

This section provides a classic example of what theologians call the “Mark Sandwich”, where one story (in this case, regarding the arrival of Jesus’ family) has another inserted into the middle of it (of accusations that Jesus’ power is evil in origin). This arrangement is quite deliberate. Mark draws our attention to a relationship between the two stories, but their combination also makes an entirely new point.⁴⁵

Comparison

- The *top layer of the sandwich* is Mark 3:20-21, which is unique to Mark. The crowds are pressing in so much it is impossible for them to eat! Jesus’s family are so concerned about what they have heard about Jesus that they have travelled 30 miles from Nazareth to come and to take charge of him. They believe he must have gone mad!
- Matt. 12:22-23 provides helpful background information. The healing performed by Jesus caused people to question whether this is the “Son of David”, the promised Messiah. This alarms the Pharisees that the people should be suggesting such things.⁴⁶
- The *sandwich filler* is the accusation that Jesus is “possessed by Beelzebul”, another name for Satan.⁴⁷ All three Synoptics contain this account, plus Jesus’ counter-argument to their accusations, including the image of binding a strong man.
- The three Gospels all highlight that speaking against the Holy Spirit is the one sin that cannot be forgiven (Mark 3:29, Matt. 12:32, Luke 12:10).
- The *final layer of the sandwich* concerns the arrival of the family, wanting urgently to speak to Jesus and Jesus’ question “who is my *true* family?”

Context

- While Mark uses the literary device of sandwiching one story inside another, parallel texts do appear in Matthew and Luke, but these do not follow the same sequence and either have information added or omitted when compared to Mark. This highlights the distinctiveness of the three Gospels and makes us ponder why they offer slightly different accounts, and even which Gospels were written first. Commentators have speculated that Matthew and Luke might felt uncomfortable at the questioning of Jesus’ sanity in Mark’s account and offer this as a reason they omitted it.⁴⁸

Key Points

- Only Mark makes clear the motives of Jesus' family in "coming to seize him". This also confirms for the reader that they did not believe in him as Messiah at this point. However, his mother Mary and brother James would later become prominent in the Christian movement and we also see that Jesus does not abandon his filial duties (John 19:25-27).⁴⁹
- Until now, the ministry of teaching, healing, and casting out of demons has revealed Jesus's Divine Authority to the reader, but Jesus maintains a secrecy around his Messiahship with those he encounters. While the people are delighted at this miracle worker from God, the religious authorities have found their own behaviours criticised by Jesus and they are intent on stopping him. The two charges being made against Jesus are that either a) he has lost his mind, or b) that he is possessed and his power comes from Satan.⁵⁰ With either option, it would surely be wiser *not* to follow Jesus. If proven to be sorcery, it would be a charge that could result in a sentence of death (Lev. 20:27), although the Romans had removed that particular aspect of Jewish authority. Mark's account once again reminds us of C. S. Lewis' Trilemma, that Jesus was mad, bad or the alternative that he was actually whom he said he was.⁵¹
- The Pharisees don't deny Jesus' power to perform miracles and drive out demons, but they associate it with Satan.⁵² They question the source of his power.⁵³ We observe that for some people, miracles such as these remain insufficient to *prove* Jesus' Divine Authority, and this explains why Jesus refuses whenever unbelievers demand signs from him in Scripture.
- The logic Jesus uses in his counter-argument is straightforward: if he is working under Satan's power, why would he be working against Satan? This would be absurd, as a house that is divided must surely fall.⁵⁴ In the same way that his family wished to come and seize Jesus, the same imagery is used of binding the strong man. Jesus will be binding Satan and "plundering his house", that is, freeing people who are enslaved by sin, demonic possession and disease; one stronger than Satan is now here.⁵⁵ By restraining Satan, Jesus can release people from Satan's grip. Jesus is the superior power and Satan is not able to counter what Jesus is doing. This is God fighting for his people.⁵⁶ Every exorcism is overcoming Satan's domain.

Bible Study of Mark's Gospel

- All the miracles that Jesus performs have been done in the power of the Holy Spirit. To attribute these deeds as being done with power from Satan is an unforgivable sin. Such a thing is to deny the work of the Holy Spirit. That sin is eternal, both now in this present age and in the future age to come. No other sin compares to this and indeed everything else mankind does is forgivable, even speaking against Jesus himself.⁵⁷
- In the previous session, we saw the commissioning of the apostles, those who are following him. The imagery of the family being outside the house points to the dual idea of *insiders* and *outsiders*.⁵⁸ Jesus points to those around him as his *true* family (those who hear God's word and do his will) while the outsiders are those who maintain false assumptions about him.⁵⁹ Jesus is speaking of having a *spiritual family*, one that is in relationship with him; an extended family that has priority over biology.⁶⁰ It is a remarkable concept that, given his divine authority and status as Son of God, we might consider Jesus as inviting us to be brothers and sisters in his family:

Rom. 8:29 *Those ... "to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters".*

Heb. 2:10-12 *In bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through what he suffered. 11 Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters. 12 He says,*

*"I will declare your name to my brothers and sisters;
in the assembly I will sing your praises."*

- Both Matthew and Luke include the emphatic statement by Jesus that "whoever is not with me is against me" (Matt. 12:30, Luke 11:23). As C. S. Lewis commented in his Trilemma, Jesus leaves us no middle ground to claim anything less than Jesus was whom he claimed to be, or to deny him.

Discussion: Jesus did not conform to 1st century expectations of family. To what extent do 21st century relationships inhibit the nurturing of faith within our families?