



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Gospel According to St. Mark

Chapter 3

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Introduction

- In chapter 2, St. Mark began to present opposition to Jesus' mission
- In a series of four confrontations the Pharisees and others accuse Jesus
 1. Of blaspheming by forgiving sins
 2. Of the ritually unclean practice of mingling with sinners
 3. Of breaking the Sabbath obligation to "rest" and to do no work on the Sabbath
 4. And of failing to show piety by fasting



Introduction

- The fifth confrontation with the Pharisees occurs in this chapter when Jesus heals a man with a withered hand and uses the miracle to try once again to teach the religious leaders and the people about the true meaning of displaying piety on the Sabbath
- St. Mark begins to show the reader that following Jesus is not a matter of following Him with one's feet but in following Him with one's heart despite opposition from the world



Introduction

- The healing of the man with a withered hand is the peak in the series of teaching examples that Jesus' has given to show that He is Lord of the Sabbath
- The episode will end with Jesus' opposition declaring their intention to kill Him
- St. Mark uses the key word meaning "immediately, at once, instantly"



Introduction

Chapter Outline:

- Healing on the Sabbath 3:1-6
- A Great Multitude Follows Jesus 3:7-12
- The Twelve Apostles 3:13-19
- A House Divided Cannot Stand 3:20-27
- The Unpardonable Sin 3:28-30
- Jesus' Mother and Brothers Send for Him 3:31-35

Healing on the Sabbath 3:1-6



- *entered the synagogue*, Perhaps in Capernaum, where He had before cast out the unclean spirit
- But not on the same day, nor on that day He had had the debate with the Pharisees, about His disciples plucking the ears of corn on the Sabbath day
- But on another Sabbath, perhaps the next
- *a man was there*, Who came there either for a cure, knowing Christ to be in the synagogue, or for the sake of worship
- The narrative of St. Mark here is extremely vivid and graphic



Healing on the Sabbath 3:1-6

- He places the scene actually before us
- *they watched*, The ruler of the synagogue, and the principal men in it; particularly the Scribes and Pharisees, who followed Him wherever He went
- They observed Him diligently, and kept their eyes upon Him, to find matter of accusation against Him
- They watched Him with no friendly purpose
- The word itself signifies plot and hostility, Luke 20:20
- *whether He would heal him on the Sabbath*, Which, knowing His readiness to do good, they might expect He would



Healing on the Sabbath 3:1-6

- *“Step forward.”*, St. Cyril the Great, says, “Why did Christ instruct the man to do so? He was probably trying to move the emotions of the Pharisees towards Him, and to soften their hearts; as that man’s condition was painful enough to draw tears, and to quench the ember of vile and malice.”
- He wanted to draw them away from the unwise arguments to the practical love
- He may have said so also to raise the attention of the people to the following miracle



Healing on the Sabbath 3:1-6

- Jesus has already taught them that mercy outweighs rigid adherence to the Law in the two examples He gave in the fourth confrontation in 2:23-28
- Why are the Pharisees silent?
- The Pharisees intend to trap Jesus, but if they answer that it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath then they cannot criticize Jesus for doing good on the Sabbath by healing the man
- If they say "no" then they will show their heartlessness, lack of mercy, and union with the "evil one" rather than with God
- They intended to trap Jesus but He has turned the trap on them



Healing on the Sabbath 3:1-6

- *anger, being grieved*, With a severe and stern expression; with indignation at their hypocrisy and hardness of heart
- This was not, however, an unkind or revengeful passion; it was caused by excessive grief at their state, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts
- It was not hatred of the "men" whose hearts were so hard; it was hatred of the sin which they exhibited, joined with the extreme grief that neither His teaching nor the law of God, nor any means which could be used, overcame their confirmed wickedness



Healing on the Sabbath 3:1-6

- The bare command of God is a sufficient reason of obedience
- This man might have reasoned thus: "Lord, my hand is withered; how then can I stretch it out? Make it whole first, and afterwards I will do as You command."
- This may appear reasonable, but in his case it would have been foolishness
- At the command of the Lord he made the effort, and in making it the cure was effected!
- Faith disregards apparent impossibilities, where there is a command and promise of God



Healing on the Sabbath 3:1-6

- The effort to believe is, often, that faith by which the soul is healed
- It is worthy of remark, that as the man was healed with a word, without even a touch, the Sabbath was unbroken, even according to their most rigid interpretation of the letter of the law
- Ironically, how do the Pharisees answer Jesus question in verse 4 and show the condition of their hearts?
- They do evil on the Sabbath by immediately conspiring to kill Jesus



Healing on the Sabbath 3:1-6

- Jesus deliberately continued to heal on the Sabbath when He knew that His actions would provoke the religious authorities because as He explained in Mark 2:28, He is Lord of the Sabbath
- In healing physically and spiritually on the Sabbath, He is bringing humanity back into communion with God thereby defining and fulfilling the original purpose of the Sabbath



Healing on the Sabbath 3:1-6

- Early scholars had different definitions of the ‘Herodians,’ but the most probable is that they were not a religious, nor a political group, nor representing official positions, but they were Jewish friends of Herod the Great, working on his behalf, and on that of Rome
- And some were even claiming that Herod is Christ
- Anyhow, the Herodians were, with the Roman Governor
- Yet common interest has united the Pharisees and the Herodians, despite the great animosity between the two groups



Healing on the Sabbath 3:1-6

- Herodians were the natural opponents of the Pharisees; but here they seem to have found some common ground of agreement, though it is not very easy to say what it was, in combining against our Lord
- But it is no uncommon thing to find coalitions of men, strangely opposed to one another on most points, but united to effect some particular object; and it is easy to see how the purity and spirituality of our Lord and of His doctrine would be opposed, on the one hand, to the ceremonial formality of the Pharisee, and on the other to the worldly and secular spirit of the Herodians

A Great Multitude Follows

Jesus 3:7-12



- Jesus did not confront evil with evil
- He meekly withdrew
- Knowing their evil designs against Him, He departed out of the synagogue, and city of Capernaum; and taking His disciples with Him
- He went to the shore of the sea of Galilee; not out of fear, but because His time was not yet come, and He had more work to do
- The first stage of His ministry brought a revelation of His true identity, but now He will begin to define the identity of the community of the Messiah

A Great Multitude Follows

Jesus 3:7-12



- Jerusalem was in Judea
- It is mentioned particularly to show that not only the people of the surrounding country came, but also many from the capital, the place of wealth, and honor, and power
- *Idumea*, The country formerly inhabited by the Edomites
- It was south of Judea proper
- The word "Idumea" is a Greek word made from the Hebrew Edom
- It signifies the land of Edom, a name given to Esau, one of the sons of Isaac, Genesis 25:30

A Great Multitude Follows

Jesus 3:7-12



- *a small boat*, This was probably a small boat that belonged to the disciples, in which He could draw off from the shore, and teach the people without being pressed by them
- *lest they should crush Him*, They pressed upon Him in great numbers
- They pressed upon Him; or pushed upon Him, with great eagerness and violence
- They pushed on, and pressed so hard to get to Him, that they fell upon one another, and on Him
- *to touch Him*, Either any part of His body, or His garments, even the hem of His garment

A Great Multitude Follows

Jesus 3:7-12



- The unclean spirits uttered the same words that St. Peter did, Matthew 16:16
- But, as expressed by St. Augustine “I hear a similar confession, yet, I do not see a similar love; they embrace fear without love. Those who have the beloved, are children, but those who tremble with fear, are not. Who have the beloved, He makes them gods, but those who tremble, are confirming that they are not gods.”

A Great Multitude Follows

Jesus 3:7-12



- The unclean spirits being obliged by the Divine Power, not only to come and worship, but also to declare His majesty
- How astonishing then is the blindness of the Arians, who even after His resurrection denied Him to be the Son of God, whom the devils confessed as such when clothed with human nature

The Twelve Apostles 3:13-19



- St. Luke, the evangelist, stated that the Lord, before He started calling His disciples, *“Went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.”*, Luke 6:12
- As representing us, He wanted to proclaim that His ministers working in truth, are chosen, not according to human mind, but to divine will
- Not that He who had all things to bestow, stood in need of prayer, or had any thing to ask; but to teach us that we must undertake nothing without previously recommending the affair to heaven, in humble and fervent prayer



The Twelve Apostles 3:13-19

- Thereby showing, that much consideration and prayer ought to precede and accompany the choice and ordination of persons for ministers, and that nothing in so important a business should be done rashly
- It is fitting for us, always to seek His divine counsel, to choose ministers according to His divine heart
- The number 12 has a symbolic significance in the Holy Bible
- It is one of the so-called "perfect numbers" (3, 7, 10, 12) and signifies perfection

The Twelve Apostles 3:13-19



- The children of the Old Israel were the descendants of twelve physical fathers who were the sons of Jacob/Israel
- Now Jesus will inaugurate a new Israel through twelve men who will become the spiritual fathers of the heavenly Jerusalem
- He chose His disciples and apostles, to work with His Spirit, granting them the power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out demons
- He granted them His capabilities, to work, not in their own name, but in His, and for the sake of His Kingdom



The Twelve Apostles 3:13-19

- The Lord chose Simon, and called him Cephas or Peter, meaning the Rock, because he was privileged by a revelation by God the Father about the identity of the Son, leading him to proclaim, that He is the “Son of the living God”, Matthew 16:17
- And called James and John ‘the Sons of Thunder,’ as they, according to St. Ambrose, became like those in heaven, carrying the nature of heavenly thunder; or, according to St. Gregory of Nazianzus, owing to their eloquence

The Twelve Apostles 3:13-19



- Andrew in Greek, means strong or brave, in reference to his mature and brave association with the Lord
- Philip, means the mouth of the lamp, in reference to the shining light of the words of God coming out of his mouth
- Bartholomew means the son of the one attached to the water, probably in reference to his enjoyment of adoption to God through the water of Baptism
- Matthew means gift granted to him by the Lord, not only through forgiving his sins, but also by choosing him as an apostle

The Twelve Apostles 3:13-19



- Thomas means depths
- James the son of Alphaeus means the learned struggler
- Thadaeus means “watcher of the heart, or with the heart”
- Judas, brother of James, both also known as the brothers of the Lord
- Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot
- In the lists of the Apostles in the Gospels, Simon/Peter is always named first and Judas Iscariot is named last
- Otherwise the lists of names in the Gospels are all in a different order

A House Divided Cannot Stand

3:20-27



- The crowd, partially dispersed, reassembles again
- The press was so great, and their demands so urgent, either to hear Him preach, or have their sick healed, that Christ, and His disciples, had neither room nor opportunity to eat some food
- Though it was very necessary, especially Christ, who had been up all night, which He had spent in prayer; and had been very busy that morning in calling and appointing His apostles

A House Divided Cannot Stand

3:20-27



- *His own people heard about this*, St. Mark evidently records this, in order to show the contrast between the zeal of the multitude and the very different feelings of our Lord's own people
- They were saying now, as they said afterwards, John 10:20, *He has a demon, and is mad*
- By this word they were attributing to His excess of passion and enthusiasm overwhelming His intellect
- But it was falsely that they attributed this to Him, as Festus did to Paul, Acts 26:24

A House Divided Cannot Stand

3:20-27



- News of Christ and miracles have spread to Jerusalem, and it is probably that the Great Sanhedrin has sent teachers of the law to investigate
- Such men were also sent from Jerusalem to investigate St. John the Baptist when he began his ministry of baptism and repentance along the east bank of the Jordan River, John 1:19
- They accuse Him of being possessed by Beelzebul
- His success in driving out demons is not of God but by the power of Beelzebul the prince of demons

A House Divided Cannot Stand

3:20-27



- Beelzebul is another name for Satan that is probably derived from a title for the chief god in the Canaanite pantheon, "Baal the Lord/Prince"
- St. Matthew tells us of the miracle, which was the occasion of this blasphemy, the cure of a man not only possessed with a demon, but also blind and dumb, Matthew 12:22
- It is remarkable that Jesus responds with such patience
- He, not intimidated by the Jerusalem authorities, invites them to come within talking distance, that He may reason the matter with them

A House Divided Cannot Stand

3:20-27



- According to everyday knowledge, it is impossible to accept the claim, which Satan casts out Satan, lest his kingdom would not stand
- In ordinary wars, as in home life, opposition would definitely be followed by destruction
- The welfare of any kingdom, city, or family, depends on its peace and unity
- *That kingdom cannot stand*, not long; its internal broils and divisions will, soon bring it to desolation and distress

A House Divided Cannot Stand

3:20-27



- Satan, like every other ruler, must wish to rule his empire in peace and security
- How then can he be in union with Jesus, who oppose his authority, and is destroying his kingdom?
- A good cause will produce a good effect, and an evil cause an evil effect
- If Jesus was on Satan's side, He would act for his interest and confirm his influence among people
- But He oppose his rules by His doctrine, and his influence by His power

A House Divided Cannot Stand

3:20-27



- Their accusation is not reasonable
- Jesus is casting out demons, an act that is opposing Satan and not advancing Satan's power over the earth
- Why, Jesus asks the rhetorical question, would Satan give Him the power to weaken Satan's hold over men and to threaten Satan's kingdom?
- By casting out demons, Jesus is tying up the "strong man's (Satan) power and plundering his 'house'"
- Satan has taken over man and robbed all his energies, capabilities and gifts, to work for the kingdom of evil

A House Divided Cannot Stand

3:20-27



- That strong enemy would not get out, nor the goods he plundered would be regained, unless we first bind him
- Jesus, not in union with Satan or Beelzebub, but overmastering him, and taking possession of his goods, human souls
- *Plunder*, Mark uses the stronger and more vivid compound verb
- The verb means, primarily, to tear in pieces; to carry away, as the wind; to wipe out
- So, generally, to seize as plunder, snatching right and left
- The Lord Jesus Christ came to proclaim His authority as a destroyer of that strong (man), to regain what he plundered

The Unpardonable Sin 3:28-30



- Jesus now changes His tone
- Thus far He has reasoned with the scribes, now He solemnly warns them
- As if He is saying, “you know as well as I how absurd it is, and that I must be casting out devils by a very different spirit from Beelzebub. You are therefore not merely mistaken, you are men in a very dangerous moral condition. Beware!”
- St. Mark adds the words "*because they said, “He has an unclean spirit”*" This helps us much to the true meaning of this declaration



The Unpardonable Sin 3:28-30

- Our Lord does not here speak of every sin against the Holy Spirit, but of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit
- These words of St. Mark point to a sin of the tongue mere especially, although not excluding thoughts and deeds against the Holy Spirit
- Observe what these scribes and Pharisees did; they made a trivial and unreasonable objection at works manifestly Divine - works wrought by God for the salvation of men
- Now, they spoke against these, and knowingly and of malice credited them to the evil spirit

The Unpardonable Sin 3:28-30



- Then they blasphemed against the Holy Spirit, dishonoring God by assigning His power to Satan
- What could be more hateful than this?
- What greater blasphemy could be imagined?
- And surely they must be guilty of this sin who credit the fruits and actions of the Holy Spirit to an impure and unholy source, and so strive to ruin His work and to hinder His influence in the hearts of men

The Unpardonable Sin 3:28-30



- *never has forgiveness*, Unforgivable because never repented of
- It is the rejection of the work of the Holy Spirit
- Not only rejects but perseveres in rejecting the warnings of the conscience and the Grace of the Holy Spirit,
- Those who are blinded by religious bigotry rather than credit a good work to the Spirit of Good prefer to ascribe it to the Spirit of Evil, and thus willfully put “darkness for light” and “light for darkness.”
- Such a state if persevered in and not repented of excludes from pardon, for it is the sin unto death spoken of in 1 John 5:16



The Unpardonable Sin 3:28-30

- St. Augustine says, “Indeed every sin and blasphemy are forgiven to mankind, not only what is said against the Son of Man. As long as there is no sin of unrepentant, which is addressed to the Holy Spirit, by whom the Church forgives all sins, all sins are otherwise forgiven.”
- God places no limits upon His mercy in the offering of His gift of salvation
- The Church teaches that every human sin, no matter how bad, can be repented and forgiven with one exception

The Unpardonable Sin 3:28-30



- Anyone who deliberately and repeatedly, in his hardness of heart, refuses to recognize God's action and even attributes that action to evil, and rejects God's mercy and the gift of eternal life up to the moment he takes his last breath in death, commits the final sin that is past pardoning and that person condemns himself to the loss of eternal life
- Jesus is not necessarily saying that the Scribes have committed the unpardonable sin, but He is warning them

Jesus' Mother and Brothers

Send for Him 3:31-35



- Having brought His disciples into a house and was surrounded with a huge crowd, He wanted to proclaim that His relationship with these people, is far more exalted than that of the flesh
- He did not underestimate relationships according to the flesh, but rather proclaimed His commitment to a higher and nobler relationship
- That is why, when His Mother and brothers stood outside and sent for Him, He responded by saying: *“Who is My mother, or My brothers?”*

Jesus' Mother and Brothers

Send for Him 3:31-35



- Jesus is not rejecting His human family, but He is redefining the meaning of "family" in the context of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ that is stronger than any blood relationship
- Those who do the will of God in accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior and submitting in faith to the Sacrament of Baptism are members of His New Covenant family
- They are brothers and sisters in the family of God and co-heirs of Christ in the promise of eternal salvation

Jesus' Mother and Brothers

Send for Him 3:31-35



- St. John Chrysostom says, “The Lord instructs us to honor our relatives according to faith, more than we do towards those according to flesh and blood. Indeed, man could be a “mother” to Jesus through preaching Him; for he would be then, as though He is delivering Him in the hearts of his listeners.”
- St. Mary is the model disciple, submitting herself to the will of God for her life and supporting Jesus in His ministry by petitioning Him in His first public sign

Jesus' Mother and Brothers

Send for Him 3:31-35



- Our Lord does not refuse to go out through any, the least, inattention to His mother; He wishes hereby, to teach us the preference we should give to the business of our heavenly Father, before that of our earthly parents
- Neither does He consider His brethren as beneath His attention, but prefers spiritual before temporal duties; and shows us, that a religious union of hearts and feelings is far more lasting, and better rooted than any other ties of affinity or friendship whatsoever



Discussion

- What is the significance of the number of apostles Jesus appointed?
- Who is Beelzebul to the scribes? Why did the scribes accuse Jesus of casting demons out by the power of Beelzebul?
- If all sin can be forgiven in principle, why does Jesus refer to blasphemy against the Holy Spirit as an eternal sin?

Discussion



- What is the criterion Jesus gives for being His brother, sister, or mother? What then is His attitude to His biological mother, who has accompanied those relatives desirous of seizing him?
- What makes Jesus angry in the passage of verse 5? What is there about your own life that might provoke this sort of anger in Him?
- Why did Jesus' relatives think he was "beside himself"? Have you ever been criticized for "being too religious", or have you yourself criticized others for that? If either is the case, what do you think is the problem?



Discussion

- Who is the “strong man” in verse 27? If a “strong man” has gained a foothold in some area of your life, how can you bind him?
- If you want to be a kinsman of Jesus, what will it take for you to be accepted as one?