

# Gospel of Mark

## Chapter 3

- 1 *Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand.*  
 2 *They watched him to see whether he would cure him on the sabbath, so that they might accuse him.*  
 3 *And he said to the man who had the withered hand, "Come forward."*  
 4 *Then he said to them, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent.*  
 5 *He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored.*  
 6 *The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.*

### Notes:

Verses 1-6 – This is the final story in the confrontations with the Pharisees that began in Chapter 2. Previously, the Jesus and the Pharisees had a series of encounters where Jesus' teachings and actions had challenged the authority of the Pharisees and scribes. Jesus, of course, always came out ahead.

Verse 2 – Healing, by and large, was not allowed on the Sabbath. There were exceptions for any serious conditions that could be life-threatening that should be healed on the Sabbath. The Pharisees had an extensive list of what could and could not be healed, and a withered hand fit squarely in the "not an emergency" category.

Verse 4 – Jesus' phrase here is a standard opening to a type of debate that was common in Jesus' day. One would open the debate with a question in order to clarify or advance an idea about the law. The typical response would be to answer the question, but the Pharisees decide not to engage in the conversation. They know that they will be beaten, but at the same time, they refuse to admit that Jesus has a point.

Verse 5 – Jesus was angered and grieved because they, of all people, should recognize truth and righteousness when they see it. Now, they're not even willing to discuss the matter.

Verse 6 – The confrontation with the Pharisees is concluded... for now. They will continue the matter when they are ready to try to trap or kill Jesus.

### Coming to a better understanding of the text:

Why do you think the Pharisees are so unwilling to engage the truth when it is right in front of them?

Why might they have seen Jesus as a threat to the spiritual wellbeing of the people?

### Verses 7-12

- 7 *Jesus departed with his disciples to the sea, and a great multitude from Galilee followed him;*  
 8 *hearing all that he was doing, they came to him in great numbers from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, beyond the Jordan, and the region around Tyre and Sidon.*  
 9 *He told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, so that they would not crush him;*  
 10 *for he had cured many, so that all who had diseases pressed upon him to touch him.*  
 11 *Whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and shouted, "You are the Son of God!"*

12 But he sternly ordered them not to make him known.

### Notes

Verse 7 – The departing to the sea is another reference to the wildness/sea theme that Mark develops. Both places are places of wild tumult and danger. Usually it signals a confrontation with evil. Here specifically, it shows the power of God breaking into the bondage of sickness and sin.

Verse 9 – If the crowd becomes too pressing, Jesus has a boat ready as a matter of practicality. It would keep him from being pressed into the sea.

Verse 11 – The evil spirits identified him. It was believed in some types of mysticism of the time, that knowing someone's true identity would give power over that person. If Mark is trying to address this though process, it shows that nothing could give the unclean spirits power over Jesus. He had the ultimate authority over them.

Verse 11 – Even though the unclean spirits understood who Jesus was, it seems that none of the gathering people did.

### Coming to a better understanding of the text:

Why are the people coming to Jesus in this passage?

Why do you think that Jesus does not want them to know who he is?

### Verses 13-19a

13 He went up the mountain and called to him those whom he wanted, and they came to him.

14 And he appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message.

15 and to have authority to cast out demons.

16 So he appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter);

17 James son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder);

18 and Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Cananaean,

19a and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

### Notes:

Verse 13 – The mountain is an important factor. In the Old Testament revelation often happened on a mountain. Likewise many important religious sites were on mountains. Likewise, elsewhere in this gospel, Jesus' transfiguration happens on a mountain.

Verse 14-15 – Jesus names 12 disciples, charges them, and gives them the authority to expand and continue his mission. This becomes particularly important after the resurrection and ascension. It is important to note that it is their close relationship with Jesus that allows for them to continue his mission and have the authority he gives.

### Coming to a better understanding of the text:

What stories of the Old Testament do you remember where God reveals something on a mountain?

Can you think of any important places in the Old Testament that were on mountains?

The number 12 is important here as well. Can you think of anything that there were 12 of in the Old Testament? How is that symbolism used here?

**Verses 19b-21**

19b Then he went home.

20 and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat.

21 When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, "He has gone out of his mind."

**Notes:**

Verses 19b-35 – This is the beginning of one story that brackets another. Jesus' family doesn't get his mission. Then we have a story about how the Pharisees don't get his mission. Then Mark finishes the story about how Jesus' family doesn't get Jesus' mission. The two stories will have related themes.

Verse 20 – People would have seen this as a big mistake on Jesus' part. He is travelling the countryside and gathering people together. But now he's gathered people and he can't provide for his guests, or even provide for himself.

Verse 21 – We don't know exactly who of Jesus' family went, though we can guess from later verses. One thing is clear, they don't understand his ministry, and the things that are going on seem odd enough that they suspect that he has become mentally ill. They go to his home to try to physically control him.

**Verses 22-30**

22 And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, "He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons."

23 And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan?"

24 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 his end has come.

27 But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered.

28 "Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter;

29 but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin" –

30 for they had said, "He has an unclean spirit."

**Notes:**

Verse 22 – "scribes" – Specifically, Mark means the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was the highest religious court in Israel. They made the final ruling on religious matters. The fact that they come down from Jerusalem means that there were some very serious charges levied against Jesus. They only came down when the spiritual health of the region was at stake. They would get a first-hand account of what was happening and then pronounce their judgment.

Verse 22 – The Sanhedrin said that Jesus must be casting out the demonic spirits by the power of demonic spirits. That seems horribly illogical, though in that day, there were people that *claimed* to have the power to cast out spirits, and would use magical rites and ceremonies to try to cast out the demon... after collecting a fee, of course.

Verse 23-26 – We thought the idea seemed horribly illogical at first, and Jesus affirms that it is indeed horribly illogical.

Verse 27 – Satan is the strong man. In order to cause disarray in Satan's domain, someone stronger than Satan would have to tie him up. Since the power of sin, sickness, and decay are evident in the world, it is correctly regarded as a place where Satan dwells. But Jesus has come to bind him, and set things right.

Verse 28-29 – Jesus says that any sin can be forgiven... except one. In this passage, the blasphemy he refers to has long been regarded as the intentional and willful declaration of an act of the Holy Spirit is an act of Satan.

**Coming to a better understanding of the text:**

If magicians had been casting out demons, wouldn't it be a matter of Satan's house being divided?  
How do we explain such activities?

Sometimes people are worried that they may have or might accidentally commit an unforgivable sin.  
How would you address that fear, based on this passage?

**Verses 31-35**

31 Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him.

32 A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you."

33 And he replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?"

34 And looking at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers!

35 Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."

**Notes:**

Verse 31 – This is a continuation of the story when Jesus' family is trying to restrain him. We can imagine that they were calling into his house for him to abandon his insane mission.

Verse 34-35 – The people around Jesus speak of a literal family connection, but Jesus speaks of something else. Jesus says that the people that have faith in him and follow him share an intimacy that only comes through faith. The community of faith that whole-heartedly seeks God's will is the true family that share an intimacy beyond common relationship bonds.

Verses 31-35 – This concludes the bracket. It begins with Jesus' family misunderstanding him and rejecting his mission. It moves on to the Sanhedrin rejecting his mission. Then it moves back to his family, who still doesn't understand. The context of the bracket make it clear that his family just doesn't get what Jesus is all about.

**Coming to a better understanding of the text:**

Why don't Jesus' family members understand? Why don't the Sanhedrin? What is similar and what is different about the two groups of people?