**Jesus accused of being an agent of Satan** 11/6/23 dkm

Read: Mark 3:20-35,

Text: Mark 3:20-30

Psalms: 130, 95:6-11, 32:1-6, 117

I was told of a minister who was invited to a function in the church hall but refused to come because it was his day off. Jesus does not appear to have had his ‘day off’, although he did make attempts to get away with his disciples for some peace and quiet. But here in Mark 3 we read about crowds following Jesus wherever he went; and he never refused to heal people and preach the kingdom of God. He was back in his adopted home in Capernaum, after choosing his twelve apostles, when the crowd gathered yet again. They did not even allow Jesus time to sit and eat (3:20). Jesus needed help with managing the crowds, so his relatives thought, so they came to help him. Our first subheading is, ‘Family think he is crazy’, our second, ‘Pharisees say he is demon-possessed’, and thirdly, ‘Jesus warns of unforgivable sin’.

**1. Family think he is crazy**

News of the crowds following Jesus had spread far and wide. People were flocking to hear the words of Jesus, and see how he was healing sick people and casting out demons. Naturally, his own family back in Nazareth heard how famous Jesus had become with huge crowds following him wherever he went (3:20). His mother, Mary, may have been concerned for his welfare; his brothers were probably more critical of what Jesus was doing. Were they concerned about the honour of their family? In verse 21 most translations have, ‘His family’, but in the NKJV we read ‘His own people’; it is literally ‘those beside him’. Some argue that these friends were not his family but the context, namely verse 31, point to them being his family.

His family came to ‘lay hold of Him’, which we take as them trying to rescue him from the crush of the crowds. From an early age Jesus started acting ‘strangely’. At the age of twelve he sat with the teachers in the temple, until his parents came to take him home (Luke 2:48). Jesus was now grown up, and his step-father apparently no longer alive, but still he had this family and they felt responsible for him. They did not understand the mission in which he was engaged; he had to be about His Father’s business (Luke 2:49). At the wedding in Cana, Jesus gently rebuked his mother for getting him involved when the wine ran out (John 2:4).

It may have been others who were saying that Jesus was ‘out of his mind’ or crazy, but his brothers or half-brothers probably agreed with them (see 6:3). From a worldly perspective Jesus appeared as a crazy man, even a dangerous man, as he ‘stirred up’ the crowds. His brothers thought they should act before the authorities took action. We are not told of Roman soldiers being concerned but the Jewish authorities certainly were. They had already decided to destroy Jesus (3:6). His family ‘decided that they must save Jesus from the consequences of His own vocation’. Jesus would later have one of his own disciples try to rescue him for the consequences of his divine vocation when Peter told him that he would not suffer and die (Mat 16:22).

Some well-meaning people thought I was crazy when the Lord called me to leave my Government job and go with my family as missionaries to India. Thankfully it was not our family or fellow believers. But many a missionary or minister has had to contend with family and or friends who had no understanding of the call of the Lord to be his witness to the ends of the earth. Like Jesus, they have had to say, ‘I must be doing the will of God; I must be about my Father’s business’. For a follower of Jesus it must always be Father God, before family, before friends, and before finances.

**2. Pharisees say he is demon-possessed**

Family and friends might have thought Jesus was crazy but some, namely the religious authorities who had come down from Jerusalem, came up with a more sinister and blasphemous suggestion regarding the behaviour of Jesus. The scribes and Pharisees said, ‘He has Beelzebub’ and, ‘by the ruler of the demons He casts out demons’. The ruler of the demons is Satan. These men, the men who opposed Jesus and had decided to destroy him, said that Jesus was demon-possessed. We might think that in plotting to kill Jesus they had reached the depths of depravity, but Jesus points to something even more sinister and spiritually dangerous in their response to his healing of a demon-possessed man.

Canaanite deities were called ‘Baals’. Baalzebul means, ‘lord of the house or kingdom’- hence ruler or prince of demons. This name is found in 2Kings 1:2 as the god of Ekron, a Philistine city. Baalzebub or Beelzebub means ‘lord of flies’ and is thought to be a deliberate Hebrew corruption of the name. The Hebrews used this name to refer to Satan, and this is how Jesus understood the term. So, as Jesus clarifies for them, they were saying that he was casting out Satan by the power of Satan (3:23).

Satan is real and his power is real. He is a spiritual being who opposes God; he is literally the ‘adversary’. He is the ruler of this world, or was until Jesus defeated him at the cross and resurrection (Heb 2:14). He was very active in this world when Jesus was here, active in tempting and opposing Jesus. In casting out demons, Jesus asserted his authority over Satan and his rule in people’s lives. Satan’s rule is clearly seen in those who are demon-possessed. He actually rules in the lives of all who are outside of Christ; such rule is not as obvious as with demon- possessed people, but just as real. Satan’s rule means torment and the lack of peace, and sometimes physical harm and death.

Jesus was indeed casting out demons, and Matthew has this accusation coming immediately after Jesus healed a demon-possessed man who was both blind and mute (Mat 12:22). The crowds asked if he might be ‘the Son of David’ or Messiah. Many watched Jesus at work and listened to him with an open mind, as indicated by this question. But there were also people whose mind was closed to the possibility of Jesus being the Messiah. With closed minds, and more to the point, hard hearts, they came up with another explanation for the works of Jesus. In their spiritual blindness the Pharisees came up with another idea, this absurd suggestion the Jesus was casting out demons by the power of Satan.

It is hard for people who are blind to their sinful and evil ways to see their sin. The prophet Nathan used a parable to show David his sin, and he repented. Jesus used a parable to show the Pharisees that their accusation was foolish and sinful, but they did not repent. Jesus’ parable was simple: If a kingdom is divided against itself it will inevitably collapse, or if a house is divided it cannot stand. We all know that division within an army will lead to its defeat, or division within the government will lead to its downfall. The Pharisees failed to apply this logic to what they saw in Jesus casting out demons from demon-possessed people.

The Pharisees did not deny the reality of demon-possession because they themselves, or their ‘sons’, were sometimes able to exorcise demons (Mat 12:27). The word ‘sons’ here means students or followers, those under the authority of the Pharisees. There were Jewish exorcists in those days (Acts 19:13); just how effective they were we do not know. Moreover, the Jewish historian Josephus testifies to Jewish exorcisms in his day. The Pharisees were trapped by their own words, a classic case of, ‘You can’t have it both ways’. They would be judged by their own ‘sons’ because they were saying, in effect, that their people were casting out demons by the power of Satan.

Besides, if Jesus was casting out demons by the power of Satan, it meant Satan was rising up against himself and would soon come to an end (3:26). He would come to an end, but this will not be until the risen Jesus casts him into the lake of fire, along with all his victims, all whose names are not written in the Book of Life (Rev 20:10, 15).

Jesus makes another point with regard to the Pharisees accusing him of being an agent of Satan. ‘No one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods unless he first binds the strong man’ (3:27, Mat 12:29). Jesus was casting out demons by the ‘finger of God’. This means he is more powerful than demons, and Satan their prince. Jesus pictures a spiritual battle going on, a battle for the souls of men, as he performs mighty works and preaches the kingdom of God. The Messiah was not coming to overthrow earthly kingdoms, at least not directly. He came to overthrow the kingdom of Satan, the ruler of this world (John 14:30). Satan rules through the ‘sons of disobedience’ (Eph 2:2). But in casting out demons, Jesus demonstrated his supreme power, power to enter a strong man’s house, bind him and plunder his goods. Satan is bound today; we can think of him as being on a leash, allowed to afflict God’s people only as God allows.

Jesus spoke of the kingdom of heaven ‘forcefully advancing’ (Mat 11:12). Every healing, every demon cast out, every person who repented and believed in Jesus Christ, was one person delivered from the power of Satan and into the kingdom of God. This is how the kingdom of God is advancing still today. The kingdom of God will prevail; it will prevail in and through the cross and resurrection of Jesus. ‘If God is for us, who can be against us?’ (Rom 8:31). ‘Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who makes intercession for us’ (Rom 8:33-34).

**3. Jesus warns of the unforgivable sin**

There is no sin so bad that, when confessed, Jesus will not forgive- well, almost no sin. The ‘unforgivable sin’, as it is called, is a matter of concern to many Christians, and rightly so because it is here in the Bible; although with less attention being given to the seriousness of sin in our day the question of the unforgivable sin does not seem to be as concerning as it once was. All sin is against God and all sin is serious, but there is forgiveness, there is ‘plenteous redemption’ in the blood of Jesus Christ. There is a ‘but’ to consider here in verse 29, as Jesus speaks of blaspheming against the Holy Spirit. Blasphemy involves utterance, although all the words we speak come from our heart. The third commandment refers to the sin of blasphemy, of taking the Lord’s name in vain, but sin against the Holy Spirit is in a category of its own.

The ‘unforgivable sin’ is unforgivable because it makes repentance impossible. Repentance is impossible when good is called evil, and evil is called good. This is what the Pharisees were doing. They were saying that Jesus had ‘an unclean spirit’ (3:30). They became so hardened in their hearts that they were calling good works evil works. They were not doing this out of ignorance. They were doing so deliberately and wilfully. ‘It is not that God refuses to forgive, it is that the person who sees good as evil, and evil as good is quite unable to repent, and thus come humbly before God for forgiveness’ (Morris). When a person loses any sense of right and wrong, any sense of sin, they see no reason to repent.

Since it is the Holy Spirit, through the word of God, who convicts of sin, this is sin against the Holy Spirit, blasphemy against the Spirit of God. It is a cutting off from the only power that can bring repentance and the forgiveness of God. Such a person will not be forgiven, but is subject to eternal condemnation (3:29). By accusing Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Satan, Jesus solemnly warned the Pharisees of this sin. If Judas was listening he, as ‘the son of perdition’ paid no heed. Peter, on the other hand, repented after he denied Jesus.

‘If we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins’ (1John 1:9). But even in writing these words John warns against saying we have no sin. If we say this we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. We are actually calling God a liar (1John 1:8, 10). This is not unlike the position of the Pharisees. They were telling a big lie, a demon- inspired lie, in attributing the good work of God to the adversary, to the devil.

If you or anyone is concerned about having committed the unforgivable sin you can be sure you have not. Those guilty of this sin have no sense of guilt. Their hearts have become as hard and as confounded as those of the Pharisees. Their foolish hearts are darkened, and they have turned the truth of God into a lie (Rom 1:25).