

Being Jesus' Family

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[0 : 0 0] in parables. How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, the 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. 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. Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven. They are guilty of an eternal sin.

He said this because they were saying he has an impure spirit. Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him.

A crowd was sitting around him and they told him, your mother and your brothers are outside looking for you. Who are my mother and my brothers? He asked. Then he looked around at those seated in a circle around him and said, here are my mother and brothers. Whoever does God's will as my brother and sister and mother. Amen.

Sorry, there's quite a lot of stuff up here actually. I've brought the Bible up as all you too, should I say. Great. So hello, my admoner, welcome to Jamie's. My name is Jack. I'm a member of the congregation here.

I'm just going to pray for us as we start. Father God, we thank you for your word and we thank you that you speak to us through it. Please help us now to listen carefully to what you are saying to us in your word.

[2 : 0 1] Please help us, give us understanding and work in our hearts by your spirit. In Jesus' name, amen. Our question for this week is, who belongs in God's people? Who belongs in God's people?

Who can say that they can have a place in God's kingdom with him? It's a crucial question. It's a question of, you know, what is a Christian? Who belongs to God?

Are people perhaps only Christians because of their backgrounds? It's one of the things that we were thinking about last week. And this is what one of my old flatmates used to say to me. We used to chat about God. I'd perhaps invite him along to things. As Jamie and Rebecca were telling us earlier, I was only a Christian because I had grown up in a Christian family. And he was an atheist because he had grown up in a family full of atheists and didn't believe in God and so on. I thought about this last week. Could you say that we belong to God because we've been coming to church for a long time or because we've done lots of Christian things in the past? And perhaps we've served on rotas or committees. We've been on camps and done Bible studies. And perhaps we even know a lot about God. We could say that we know a lot about the Bible. And we're able to give the right questions when people ask us. Is that what makes me a Christian? Is it my knowledge or my activity?

And it can be very tempting to feel that way. And if that was the way it worked, then what about people who are new to it, for people who don't have that sort of background? Is it just about doing your time and spending a certain amount of time doing things before you can count yourself as belonging to God? And you could say, well, perhaps it's not for me. I don't have enough of the credentials. I don't tick enough of the boxes. I don't know enough. Or I'm not good enough. Or I haven't been part of it for long enough. And what does it mean to be a Christian? What does it mean to be part of God's people? What we saw last week is that Jesus is starting a new people. And we saw that he'd been rejected by the kind of religious establishment, by the secular elites, the religious elites. And church and states, the Pharisees and the Herodians, they both said they wanted to kill Jesus because of what he was doing. So Jesus starts again. He picks 12 new people, 12 new people to be the leaders of a new group, to be the leaders of a new set of God's people. And this group, this new group, replaces the old group, replaces the old Israel as a people who belong to God. So who does Jesus include in his new people? Who's in and who's out? And that's what we're going to be thinking about this evening in Mark chapter 3. In Mark chapter 3, verses 20 to 35, do keep your Bibles open if you've closed them. We meet two groups of people. We meet his family, verse 21. His family heard about this. And we meet the teachers of the law, the teachers of the law who come down from Jerusalem.

And we're going to look at them both in turn to see what we learn about who is part of God's people. So we start by looking at the teachers of the law. And the passage starts with the family, but we're going to start with the teachers of the law first of all. And who are they? Who are the teachers of the law? Well, the teachers of the law, they are the experts on God. And they are the equivalent to perhaps your modern archbishops or theologians. They are experts on God's words. And these are people who should know about God. If you were to go to them with your questions about God, you expect them to be able to give you the answer. And they should guide you to God. Well, what do they have to say about Jesus? Well, have a look at verse 22. 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.

[6 : 05] They say the reason that Jesus has been doing all of these amazing things, he's been doing all of these incredible miracles. He is able to do them because he's empowered by supernatural evil. Beelzebul is just a way of talking about Satan, a way of talking about the devil.

And the problem is, the problem for the teachers of the law, they can't deny the evidence on one of all. They can't say that Jesus hasn't been doing those things. There's been loads of miracles, loads of things have happened. So what they are trying to do, they're trying to discredit Jesus. They're trying to undermine his authority. And it's basically a smear campaign. It's a resort of a losing side who, when they know that the truth and public opinion are turning against them, they try to go to underhanded tactics, to deceit and spreading rumors, to try and get people back on their side and to discredit Jesus. And it's nasty, it's designed to undermine Jesus and to drive people away from him, to stop them from listening to him. But how does Jesus reply? Well, Jesus says they've got it wrong. Their interpretation makes no sense. They misunderstood who he is.

And look down at verse 24, or end of verse 23. So Jesus called them over to him and began to speak to them in parables. How can Satan drive out Satan? And then expand on that, it says basically the same thing in two different ways. So verse 24. If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. The house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. The point is this, if something is split, if there is infighting, then it can't protect itself from the outside. It can't protect itself from attacks. So it doesn't make sense, it says. If I'm on the same side as Satan, by doing all this work of healing and casting out demons, then all I'm doing is going against his work. Someone who's on Satan's side wouldn't do that. This isn't what you'd expect to see.

So instead, Jesus offers the real explanation. And that's the second thing I would like us to see, that Jesus isn't empowered by evil. He makes the point that he is God's rescuer. Jesus is God's rescuer. Look down with me at verse 27, or 26 and 27. And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand, his end has come. 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. So Jesus talks to them in a parable. And here's the explanation of the parable. Who is the strong man? Well, from this, it is Satan. Satan is the strong man. He is the one who is being defeated. And who is the one who beats him up and gives him a bloody nose? Jesus. Jesus is the one who is stronger than him. The one who comes on, ties him up, binds him so he can plunder the house. And that leaves us asking, well, who is, what is the plunder? What is the thing that Jesus takes off Satan? Well, plunder is people. Jesus has been taking people away from Satan through his preaching and his miracles, his casting out of demons that we've seen him do through Mark so far. He has been rescuing people from all of the things that Satan has unleashed into the world. Right at the beginning of the Bible, we learn that Satan is the one who deceives Adam and

Eve so that they rebel against God. And that brings sickness and death into the world, evil into the world. Happens right at the start. And those are the things that Satan has been doing. And Jesus is here to rescue people from that. And it's like there's a war on and people have been taken prisoner by an enemy.

[9 : 46] And they are bound and captured and helpless. And imagine it's a, you know, this war's happening and many are dying in this imprisonment from illness and hunger or the threat of being killed by their captors. It's actually easier for their captors to kill them than to look after them. The conditions are terrible, the sanitation is poor and the food is scarce. And the situation looks more and more desperate. Escape is impossible. And as the war becomes worse and worse, it becomes more likely they'll be killed because they're an inconvenience. So their home country decides that they need a rescue and they prepare a group highly trained to go in. It's a complex operation, daring, brave and probably at high personal cost. They go in to fight, to rescue, to bring out the captives, to bring out the prisoners and out of freedom back home to where they belong, to friends and family. Jesus is saying that he is this liberating force, the one who can overpower, the one who means to do prisoners harm. He can rescue people from the devil and bring them into eternal life.

But so what that the teachers of the law get this wrong? They say one thing about Jesus, but Jesus says another. Jesus says he is God's rescuer. They say he is evil. The next thing that Jesus tells them is that their mistake, the fact that they have not recognized him, has deeply serious consequences.

Jesus says, no matter how terrible, but there is one thing that is not forgivable. He says that is to sin against the Holy Spirit. Now what does that mean? If that is the one thing you cannot be forgiven for, the one thing that's going to leave you separated from God forever, I think it's quite important then that we know what that is. I wouldn't want to be left guessing whether I was committing that sin or not.

I think I'd want to know for sure. But what does it mean? To sin against the Holy Spirit is a failure to recognize Jesus rightly and to respond to him rightly. The teachers of the Lord, they should recognize Jesus. They should know who he is. They should know that he is God's rescuing king.

But instead of, when Jesus turns up, instead of recognizing who he is, instead of seeing who he is, they actually attribute his work to evil, they attribute it to Satan instead.

[12 : 39] And you can see the link there into verse 30. He warns them, he said this because they were saying he has an impure spirit. And that is what their sin is. That is what the unforgivable thing that they are doing.

They are saying Jesus is something other than God's rescuer. Why is it blasphemy against the Holy Spirit? Well, to think about that, I had to think about what has the Holy Spirit done in Mark so far.

So just flip back over the page with me to chapter 1, verses 9 to 11. At that time, Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, you are my son, whom I love. With you I am well pleased.

The Spirit descends onto Jesus and shows him to be God's son, to be God's king. It marks him out as God's rescuing king so he can't be missed. And in his work, the work that he does of freeing people from illness and evil, and that is something that he does by the power of the Spirit.

[13 : 47] So that's how we know that that's what the sin against the Holy Spirit is. It's completely to do with the identity of Jesus, of recognizing him rightly and acknowledging him rightly.

And it could seem perhaps unfair that Jesus says that this is the one thing that is unforgivable. But I think we would just like us to think about this a bit further, because to reject the one person who can give you forgiveness, that is Jesus, is to completely put yourself beyond their help.

It's to face the worst fate. Jesus is the one who can rescue them. He is God's king who can give them forgiveness. And the Bible tells us that without forgiveness from him, we face eternal judgment from God.

But if you turn down the rescuer, if you say no to him, what help is there for you? And it's like the people who need to be rescued, as we were talking about earlier. If the rescue team turns up at the prison camp, they turn up exhausted, bloodied, but successful, saying quickly, come with us, we can lead you out.

And the transport's here, the truck's here, it's going to take you to the plane, it's going to fly you away, take you away to safety. But the teachers of the law are like people saying, no, actually we're not coming with you.

[15 : 02] And we don't actually think you're our rescuer at all, you're one of them. But the rescuers say, look at what's happened, look at the fire, you've heard the gunshots, and there's a truck, and look at our badges, our uniform, and we're on your side, we're here to help you.

They're actually saying, no, we're quite all right by ourselves, thank you, we don't really need you. No, thank you, we're not coming. And it's so stupid of them, they're turning away their only chance to escape.

Now, Jesus isn't saying that this isn't something that can't be repented of. It's not something we can't change our minds on. And I think that's the reason he's saying it to the scribes here.

He's giving them a warning. He's saying something that the path they're headed down is unbelievably dangerous. And to continue on, it would be fatal.

And if you're here and you're not a believer in Jesus, you wouldn't say that about yourself, I'd say that thinking about the identity of Jesus is the most important thing that you can think about.

[16 : 01] And to draw false conclusions about Jesus would be the worst mistake to make. But that is a warning from Jesus. Now, what about Jesus' family?

We said we're going to look at two groups. We started out looking at the teachers of the law, and now we're going to turn to look at Jesus' family. Well, I want us to see that they are making the same mistake that the scribes are making.

They are falling into the same category. So have a look back over the page to chapter 3. And Jesus entered the house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat.

When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said he is out of his mind. The scribes, they say that Jesus is evil. The families say that he is mad.

I guess lots of us might be familiar with the kind of C.S. Lewis trilemma. Either Jesus was mad, bad, or he was God. And we basically seem to have all of those options here in this passage. What, Jesus is mad, Jesus is evil.

[17 : 04] And the reason that Mark structures the way the passage, the way he does, he starts off with Jesus' family, then he goes to the scribes, and he goes back to Jesus' family again, is to show us the danger that the family are in.

It starts off with the family. What do they say? They say something about Jesus. They come up with a different conclusion about the evidence. They see these crowds gathering, they see all this hubbub, and they go, he's mad.

And the scribes say, well, he's evil. They both see what Jesus is doing, and they draw wrong conclusions about him and his activity. The scribes want to discredit him, but the family may be motivated by something different, perhaps by concern.

Perhaps they are disturbed by what they see is happening, and they want to kind of keep things under control, from to go back to how they were before. But the word they want to take charge of him, that implies physical force.

His family, they want to section Jesus, and they want to lock him away. They want to put his influence back into the box, back where he came from, and back to Nazareth. He's no longer God's son, just a normal person.

[18 : 12] And in doing that, they are becoming just like the teachers of the law. His family, Jesus' own family, are in real danger of getting it wrong. And his family, well, they face severe consequences from doing that, and that's the next thing I want us to see.

His family face exclusion from God's family. So if we join back the scene in verse 31, then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived.

Standing outside, they sent someone to call him. Someone calls into Jesus, Jesus, your family, they're here. The crowd is sitting around. Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.

And look at Jesus' response in verse 33. Who are my mother and my brothers, he asks. Then verse 34, he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, Here are my mother and my brothers.

You can't miss it. What is he saying about his own mother, his own physical mother, who is there, who gave birth to him, sung to him, and fed him, and nurtured him? What is he saying about his own brothers, the ones he had fights with, played with, and grew up with?

[19 : 19] Jesus is saying, They are not my family. I have another family, a new family, closer to me than them. His own family, they are left on the outside.

You can't miss the physicality of what's happening in the passage. His family on the outside, they're outside the building, outside the crowd. Jesus is saying, No, this is my family, not those.

They are making the same mistake as the scribes, and at this point, they are excluded from God's family, from God's people. Jesus would exclude his own family from God's kingdom because they do not respond to him as God's king.

His identity is so important that even his own family would be left on the outside, unforgiven, if they don't respond to him. Now, it's important when I say this to caveat this.

Obviously, lots of you, I guess, will be thinking, but his family, don't they kind of come good in the end? And yes, that is true. Later on in the Gospels, we do understand that, and we know from kind of the rest of the New Testament as well, that Jesus' family do turn to trust him and to recognize him as king.

[20 : 21] But it's so important to recognize that without that, that even his own family would be on the outside. And we should not miss the force of this. The very people you might expect to be in, the very people you might expect to get a free pass into the kingdom of God, they don't get it because they're wrong on the most crucial issue of all.

I think you just have to imagine the shock of us, the shock of this for ourselves, to feel it, to put ourselves in their shoes. I tried to do this myself. We had an extended family holiday over the summer, and it was a great time together.

All of my dad's side of the family met up. But imagine I'd driven down three hours to where we were staying. I'd gone to find my parents or my siblings, my brothers or my sister, to speak to them, to say hi, to give them a hug or whatever.

And like you know, family, like lots of families, we enjoy eating food together and spending time together and chatting together. And you assume when you go to your family, you'd be met with warmth or a smile or affection.

But imagine that when I turned up, I'd just been shown the door, who are you? Is there someone you know here? To be treated like a stranger, to be treated like an outsider. This is the shock of this passage.

[21 : 32] The people you would expect to be in are not. And it's a terrible warning to his family as well as to the teachers of the law. But the identity of Jesus is the most serious thing, the most important thing.

But this passage isn't all kind of doom and gloom. We also find immense and amazing hope, actually, in this passage, as Jesus talks about who his family is. Because being included in God's people, being part of God's kingdom, that is open to anyone.

Have a look with me at verse 35. It's an amazing verse. Verse 34 and 35. Here are my mother and my brothers. Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother.

And this is a passage of two whoever's. Whoever sins against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven. But whoever does God's will, anyone, whoever means anyone, anyone who does the will of God, it doesn't matter who they were before.

All that matters is they do God's will. They are part of God's family. They are, what does it mean to do the will of God? They are the people who listen to Jesus and who recognize that he is God's king, that he has authority.

[22 : 50] They treat him as their king and their rescuer. When Jesus is saying, he's pointing, so you have to imagine he's kind of in the room in the middle of these people. He's saying, whoever does God's will, whoever's listening to me seated around him in a circle, whoever does God's will, and they're saying, when he means God's will, he means my will.

He's putting himself in that situation in this passage. Whoever recognizes him for who he is and responds to him rightly is accepted by him and included by him and forgiven by him and is part of his family.

Jesus' family, God's family, belonging to a new kingdom, to the world that is yet to come with no sickness and no death and everything they have done wrong, forgiven. God's people is made up of people who recognize who Jesus is and so obey him.

And if you don't do that, Jesus is saying, you're out. But if you do do that, then you're in and that's amazing. And Mark wants us to be warned and to be encouraged.

Now these are two really important things that go together, who Jesus is and how we respond to him. What does he want us to do? What does he want us today to do?

[24 : 00] How can we be part of God's family for ourselves? It's not an easy question actually to answer just from this section. You know, Jesus actually doesn't tell it what does it mean to do, what does it mean to do God's will again?

Well, there's been one command we've had so far from Jesus in chapter 1 verse 15. At the time has come, he said, Jesus said, the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news.

Jesus wants us to believe. He wants us to see who he is. He wants us to see who he is as our king and believe not just in theory but in practice as well. He wants us to trust him, to acknowledge in ourselves that Jesus is the one that we need to rescue us from our sin.

Then we need to repent as well. It's repent and believe. He wants us to change our minds, to start living for him instead of living for ourselves and our own agenda. So in some way, to turn away from Jesus is the worst thing we could possibly do.

And if you're here and not a believer in Jesus again, I would urge you to take the time to look into Jesus seriously, to properly weigh up the evidence. Because if he is God, then the stakes could not possibly be higher.

[25 : 16] And what you make of him and how you respond to him decides what happens to us for all of eternity. And wouldn't it be worth being right about that? But now we're just going to turn to have a bit more of a think about what it means to be part of God's family.

How do we live as part of Jesus' family? We've said a lot of things that actually it doesn't mean. It doesn't mean physical or biological family. It doesn't mean attending church or just doing things in church. To be part of God's people is to be part of a group that is centered around Jesus.

And how we respond to him is the most important thing. I want to say that if we have trusted in Jesus, if we believe in our hearts that he is our king and our lord, then we are part of his family.

And I just want us to spend a couple of minutes as we close thinking about that. For people who recognize Jesus as their king, you are his brother or you are his sister or his mother.

You couldn't possibly be any closer to Jesus if you recognize that about him. And you're not just kind of God's people's subjects in a kingdom under a distant king who doesn't care.

[26 : 21] But we're family when we trust in Jesus. His family, cared for by Jesus, loved by Jesus. A Jesus who cares about what happens in our day-to-day lives.

He cares about our day-to-day and like people do in families. He wants us to walk more in step with him. And some implications of that, being in Jesus' family means we're part of a forgiven family.

Jesus' family aren't made up of people who do nothing wrong. Jesus' family isn't a family where you have to kind of scrub up and pull your life together to sit around a donut table and pretend like there's no problems, pretend it's all okay and everything's fine.

Jesus' family is a family that's made up of sinners. We saw, I thought about it briefly last week, but it's a family made up of people who fit into chapter 2, verse 17. So just look back over the page.

It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but those who are ill. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, Jesus says in chapter 2, verse 17. He knows our sin and our rebellion and our weakness.

[27 : 25] And Jesus knows that when he calls people, he's calling sinners to be part of his family. And he's going to call a group of people who are going to get things wrong and going to let him down. He knows he's calling people who are going to think wrongly about God and speak wrongly and do wrongly.

That's why he's come. He came to die and to offer us forgiveness. And it's something that we experience as Christians. We continue to sin even when we trust that Jesus is our Lord.

And that makes us feel distant from God. But being forgiven by Jesus isn't a kind of one-time thing. It's the ongoing experience of living as a Christian, of being part of his family.

And if you're kind of thinking you're going to get to a point in your life as a Christian where you're going to stop needing Jesus' forgiveness and you'll kind of basically be sorted, I think you're probably mistaken. And that hasn't been my experience.

I don't think it'll be anyone's experience here in this room. Not that we don't change or grow. I hope that we are. But we don't stop needing forgiveness from him. We don't stop needing to continue to turn to him, to ask for his help, to live for him.

[28 : 30] He knows all the things that we have done wrong. And verse 28 is meant as a warning to a teacher of the law, which applies to people in Jesus' family. People who are forgiven all their sins and every standard they utter.

And then secondly, we are a listening family. We're a forgiven family and therefore a listening family. A Jesus family isn't just defined by forgiveness, as if you have a one-time forgiveness and go away and do what you like.

It's also defined by listening to him. The crowd, who he says are his family, they're sat around him listening to his words, listening to his teaching. And just like them, we can hear God's will in Jesus as he speaks to us as we come to the Bible.

Anywhere we hear his voice, where we open up the Bible together on Sundays or midweek in routes or one-to-one or by ourselves. It's something that we do continuously. It's the family activity.

And listening to him, it's not just talking about comprehension, but it's talking about wanting to change our lives to live more in line with Jesus as our Lord. As we think about what it means for us to change for ourselves according to what we learn.

[29 : 38] To think about what it means for our lives when God says it. So there's an amazing opportunity from this passage, Jesus saying, come and be part of my family. Be forgiven by me. Be close to me.

Know me. And be in the new world that he's going to bring about. Let me pray for us. Father God, we thank you that we have this amazing chance to be part of your family.

And thank you that we do trust in you, if we recognize you as our King and as our Lord, even when we know that we don't deserve it. And we thank you that you welcome us into your family and that you forgive us and care for us and teach us.

I ask for each of us that we would live with you as our Lord and King and we wouldn't make the mistake that the family or the scribes make, but that we would trust you for ourselves. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.