

## "Frenemies"

Mark 3:20-35

*<sup>20</sup> Then he went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. <sup>21</sup> And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, "He is out of his mind." <sup>22</sup> And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "by the prince of demons he casts out the demons." <sup>23</sup> And he called them to him and said to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? <sup>24</sup> If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. <sup>25</sup> And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. <sup>26</sup> And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end. <sup>27</sup> But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house. <sup>28</sup> "Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, <sup>29</sup> but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin"— <sup>30</sup> for they were saying, "He has an unclean spirit." <sup>31</sup> And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. <sup>32</sup> And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you." <sup>33</sup> And he answered them, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" <sup>34</sup> And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers!" <sup>35</sup> For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother." (ESV)*

Besides the sermon text I just read to you, other events this week really got me thinking about family, particularly my extended family. What really got it started was earlier in the week when Mercy, our youngest daughter, came to me. She's in junior high. She asked, "Dad, do you have anything that is fifty years or older that I could take to school to show for a presentation we're doing?" I said, "Oh, oh, oh. Come with me, honey." Of course I took her straight to the woodshop. The first thing I pulled out for her was a Bailey Number 8 [antique woodworking plane] made in 1901. That's 109 years old. It's about 30 inches long and weighs about 12 pounds. I said, "Honey, this beauty is going to impress everyone in your class." She said, "It sort of needs to fit in my backpack." So, that didn't work. I said, "How about the Number 6? That will fit." "Not really." "Five?" "No." "Four?" "No. I was really thinking of something other than tools." I said, "All right." We went back to my bedroom and I rummaged through an old drawer and found a watch that my grandmother had given me. In fact, a year or two ago my grandmother called me when they thought she was going to die. One of the reasons she wanted me to come see her was so she could give me this watch. It's a big, gold pocket watch that was owned by my great-grandfather.

My great-grandfather and great-grandmother came from Serbia through Ellis Island, and the whole family moved to Steubenville, Ohio. They worked in the steel mills, and they had a whole mess of kids, and they and all of their kids at some point moved down to South Florida. Believe it or not, despite my outward appearance, my lack of melanin (that's a joke, I'm a white guy), I grew up in an extremely ethnic household, an extremely ethnic environment. In fact, if you've ever been in a Serbian household you realize why they have been in combat situations for the past 1,000 years over there. As I was thinking about the watch and Mercy was asking me questions, it made me think about what it was like being raised by this big extended family. My parents divorced when I was about five, so my grandmother and all of her brothers and sisters basically took over. The craziness of my family amazed me as I thought back. I had an Uncle Danny who did the same trick to every kid. Any time he had spaghetti he told the kid to go get him something. When you came back he would have shoved spaghetti in his ears and the little kid with eyes bugged out would ask, "What happened, Uncle Danny?" He'd say, "I ate so much spaghetti it's coming out of my ears." Every time he would do that. My favorite aunt, in Serbia you called her "Tete," Tete Feggs used to eat onions the way most people would eat apples. Remember this is South Florida so they're not Walla Walla sweet onions, they're the big, bitter onions that make the normal person cry. Not her. As a kid there's really one person whom you never wanted to have to kiss goodnight at bedtime. The person that interested me the most, the person that was really an enigma to me, and I only got to see him about once a year, was Uncle Nicky. I was a pretty poor kid, and Uncle Nicky would always come down from Ohio around Christmas time and he always gave every kid a crisp \$5 bill. Now in the early '70s for a poor kid, five bucks was a lot of money. The problem is that Uncle Nicky, as well as many of my other uncles who'd worked in the steel mills all of their life, had all of his fingers cut off down to the bottom knuckle. He basically had a nub at

the end of his right arm. The gateway between you and that \$5 bill was Uncle Nicky's nub. He'd come to you and hold that bill out and say, "Put her there, pal." [Extending right hand to shake hands] I remember as a little kid being horrified. I'm not grabbing that thing! He'd go, "Come on, put 'er there." You'd reach out and shake that nub, and he'd give you the five bucks and you'd just run.

It's interesting that in 1984 I did two things that catapulted me to the top of the family crazy list. I mean catapulted me so far into the stratosphere that no one else will ever catch up to me. The first thing I did was join the Army. The reason that was so crazy in the Moncilovich family was because every able-bodied male from the time they had come to the United States had either gone to the Naval Academy or enlisted in the Navy. I was the first one to join the Army. "What are you, crazy?" "Maybe." A couple months after enlisting in the Army I did something that out-did the Army by a million miles. I became a Christian, and by becoming a Christian in that family, they didn't know what to do with me. Frankly, they still don't know what to do with me now. Still when I walk into the room, everyone hides their beer. They don't know what to do. Families are like that, are they not? You have family – some people believe in Jesus, some people don't believe in Jesus. The people that don't believe in Jesus don't know what to do with the people that do. They think they're crazy. Now, if becoming a Christian causes a little bit of difficulty within your family, imagine if something even bigger was the case - not that you were a Christian but you were The Christ. Do you think that might cause a little upheaval in a family? Certainly when I worked with psychiatrists it caused upheaval because people came in all the time and say, "My son thinks he's Jesus." In Mary's case it was true. We're going to talk about family today. If it gives you any hope, I thought of this between services, and it made me laugh: Even Jesus was a member of a dysfunctional family. In fact most people believe that at some point Joseph died and Jesus was the eldest son. Jesus was the head of the household of a dysfunctional family, so He knows what it's like to have a family that's not all together, which no family is.

We're going to talk about three things this morning as we look at this text. We're going to look at the frustration of family. We're going to look at the absurdity of the accusations against Jesus. Finally we're going to look at this critical question that Jesus asked at the end, "Who is my mother, brother, and sisters?"

Before we actually jump into the text, there's something that should have hit you as odd: the geography of this text. It's something that Mark does all the time, on purpose. It's not just because he's the patron saint of those of us with ADHD, which he is. Mark is very intentional here. Did you notice he starts telling a story about Jesus' family and then he changes gears? All of sudden he's talking about the scribes accusing Jesus of being possessed by the devil. Then he goes back to talking about Jesus' family. This story about Jesus being accused by the scribes seems to be just stuck in here. Mark sandwiches a story within a story oftentimes. He usually does that for one of two reasons. One reason that he will sandwich one story within another story or interrupt himself is to show a comparison between two items. You read along and these two things look like they're not the same and yet they are actually really quite alike. The other reason he'll sandwich a story within a story is to show how two items are completely different, so that as you're reading the contrast strikes you very boldly. So, in this passage you have to ask yourself, "Mark has sandwiched a story. Is he trying to make the case that the response of Jesus' family to Him is completely and utterly different than that of the scribes and Pharisees, or he trying to show us that even though it's His family that the response is actually quite the same as the scribes and the Pharisees?" The answer of course is the second one that the response and actions of Jesus' family are quite like those of the scribes and the Pharisees. The scribes and the Pharisees were Jesus' biggest enemies. Notice verse 20 and 21.

*<sup>20</sup> Then he went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. <sup>21</sup> And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, "He is out of his mind."*

"He's crazy." "He's off his rocker." Any cliché you want to use, they're trying to make the case that he's crazy, or at least that's what they say. You can read this one of two ways. You can either be sympathetic to the family or you can be antipathetic. You can basically say, "Of course they're saying that." Here's Jesus who has just been going and going and going and going, and now He's back home. Home here probably means Simon Peter's home. He's back home and the crowds are still overwhelming to such an extent that He can't eat. "We need to

get in there and rescue Him, at least to give Him some time off, at least to let Him take a break, and at least let Him eat. Otherwise He's going to work Himself to death." If they only knew. So they come, and the language here is important. As they come, it says,

<sup>21</sup> And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, *"He is out of his mind."*

The word "seize" there is important. It's the same word that's used when the soldiers seized Jesus. It means to restrain by force. His family's mission in their mind was to come and restrain Jesus by force to keep Him from doing that which He wanted to do, or that which He felt called to do. Now again, you can look at it one way and be sympathetic and say, "Maybe they were just trying to help. Honestly, we'll just go and tell people He's crazy. A lot of people are saying that anyway and since we're His family they'll believe us and we'll take Him and we can get Him some rest." On the other hand, maybe they just didn't get it and they were seeking to seize Him and stop Him from doing the ministry that God had called him to do. Can you think of anyone else who tried to do that? Mark does, and he immediately tells us. Jesus' family was trying to stop Him from doing His ministry, and they told everyone He was crazy and they tried to seize Him. Now, come to think of it, the scribes came down from Jerusalem. Mark immediately goes to his next point. Jesus' family is trying to stop Him because even His family does not apparently understand His mission or what He is all about. Then the scribes come. Not only does His family not understand what He's about, but the scribes and Pharisees don't understand what He's about either. Let's look at the absurd accusations here in verse 22.

<sup>22</sup> *And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "by the prince of demons he casts out the demons."*

Now before I go on, notice the flow of what's happened here in the Book of Mark. By verse 6 of chapter 3, the first section of Mark, basically that phase of Jesus' ministry was complete, and what He accomplished in that phase of his ministry was to make everyone in His locale hate him. The verse says the Pharisees and the Herodians plotted how they might destroy Jesus." Between then and now apparently the Pharisees and the Herodians have sent word to Jerusalem that there is a troublemaker down here around Capernaum, and the Sanhedrin (which would have been the ruling council of all the Jewish groups) sent scribes down from Jerusalem to check things out. They've taken things up to the next level. It would be sort of like if in our day things have gotten beyond the jurisdiction of just your local police. Now the FBI is going to send someone from Washington, D.C., to see what's really going on because could this have national implication. That's exactly what was happening here.

They make two accusations against Jesus. The first accusation is that He is possessed by Beelzebul. This is the only place that this is used in the New Testament. In other Jewish literature it's a synonym for Satan, as is "prince of demons." The first accusation is that Jesus is possessed by Beelzebul or Satan. The second accusation is that He casts out demons in the name of, or by the power of, the prince of demons. So on one hand, He's possessed by demons, on the other the power by which He casts out demons is by the prince of demons. Here's what's interesting, and here's what you need to keep in mind whether you're a Christian or not – especially if you're not. What's not in dispute is whether or not Jesus casts out demons. Everyone agreed with that. Everyone agreed that this guy is possessed by a demon and now Jesus came and did what ever hocus-pocus He does and now the demon's gone. So everyone knew and believed that Jesus had the power to cast out demons. "Where did this power come from? How is He doing this?" At some level the same principle applies to us when we think about the Gospel of Jesus. You've got to deal with the facts about Jesus. That's where this text is going. What are you going to do with the facts about Jesus? Are you going to embrace them or are you going to scorn them, because at the end of the day there are only two things you can do with them. For example, let me give you some facts that are undisputed. First, a guy named Jesus existed. That's a fact. Almost no one would dispute that. Second thing, Jesus went around doing good. The third thing, Jesus, this man who existed, was crucified by the Romans about 2,000 years ago. That's a fact. Fourth, the same guy, Jesus who was crucified by the Romans 2,000 years ago, rose again from the dead and was seen by at least 500 people. That's documented. The question you have to ask yourself whether you're a Christian or not is, "What value am I going to attach to those events?" Jesus Himself said that, "The reason I'm going to die and be raised again from the

dead is so that you might have a relationship with God - that all of your sins would come upon Me and I will give you all of my righteousness and in the process God would smile upon you, and that you would be what Christians call 'saved.'" Are you going to attach that meaning to those events or are you not? The question as to whether these things happened is really not in dispute by anybody. The question is what you're going to do with the events. Will you embrace them and the meaning that Jesus attached to them, or will you say, "I don't believe any of that. I don't believe it even happened." When you start to do that you begin to enter the realm of where the scribes are right now. That's what upset Jesus about them. Let's look at how Jesus responds to their absurd accusations. Jesus does something interesting. They make the accusation that He's possessed and then they make the accusation that He's casting out demons by the power of Satan, and Jesus answers the accusations in reverse order. Instead of answering the accusations by answering one and two, Jesus starts with two and works His way to one. The second accusation is that He does these things by the power of the prince of demons. Jesus then addresses that accusation by doing what philosophers would call the logical fallacy "reductio ad absurdum." He shows them how absurd the argument is they are making. The argument they're making is sort of like sawing off the branch that you're sitting on. That's what absurd arguments are like. Let me read to you what he says.

*<sup>23</sup> And he called them to him and said to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan?"<sup>24</sup> If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand.<sup>25</sup> And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand.<sup>26</sup> And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end. (ESV)*

The last thing that Jesus said there was really the kicker. The statement that Satan's kingdom is coming to an end is really a statement about Himself, not about the facts of what's going on. Jesus could have just taken apart their argument. That's pretty easy. They said, "By the power of Satan He casts out Satan." Jesus said, "That's absurd. How can Satan cast out Satan? If a house is divided against itself then it can't stand. If a kingdom is divided against itself it can't stand." Then He says to them (and it's really a challenge), "If Satan casts out Satan then that means his kingdom is coming to an end." If you remember Jewish expectations and Messianic expectation of the time, it's that when Messiah comes the rule of Satan will come to an end. You can see where Jesus is going here where He says, "If Satan is being cast out, that really means his kingdom is coming to an end, doesn't it? And if his kingdom comes to an end, then what does that mean about Me?" He's now put them in a position of basically showing how their own words are testifying to Him. "When you tell me that demons are being cast out, what you're saying is that that means the kingdom of God must be invading. That means the kingdom of God must be present. I've shown you that I'm not possessed by a demon so that only leaves you one option. What are you going to do? Before you answer," He says, "Let's talk about that first accusation - he is possessed by Beelzebul." Jesus answers them in verse 27.

*<sup>27</sup> But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house. (ESV)*

He says, "No one can plunder (or steal from) a strong man unless he goes in and ties him up first. In this parable, who is the strong man? Satan is the strong man. Jesus said, "No one can plunder Satan's household unless he first binds Satan, but the only way you can bind a strong man is you have to be a lot stronger than the strong man." Jesus is basically making the point yet again, "You're telling me that demons are being cast out. No one is disputing that are they? No. That means Satan must be bound up somehow. Something more powerful than Satan must have come along and is casting these demons out. Can you tell me anything that you know of that's more powerful than Satan? Is it not God? So who do I come from? Satan or God?" Before you answer, Jesus sort of takes them to the woodshed. Notice what He says next.

*<sup>28</sup> "Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter,<sup>29</sup> but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin"—<sup>30</sup> for they were saying, "He has an unclean spirit." (ESV)*

Perhaps one of the most important words that you can underline in what I just read to you is the very first one, "Truly." In the Ancient Near East and in Jewish culture, the word "Truly" there is "Amen." In Jewish culture it was almost exclusively used at the end of a sentence. You see it all the time, not necessarily in Presbyterian churches but in almost every other protestant denomination, where the pastor says something and says, "Amen" and you respond by saying Amen. "It's a great day today. Amen?" "Amen." It's a way for people to affirm what has been said. That's why at the end of your prayers we pray something and we say, "Amen." That's why when I do something I say, "Amen and -." I want you to tell me that's true. The beautiful thing about Jesus is that He's the only person that I know of Who says "Amen" at the beginning of a sentence. Jesus doesn't make a statement then ask, "Do you agree with this?" Jesus says, "Let me just tell you what the facts are." He usually says, "Amen, Amen" so He actually takes the Amen from the end. He not only says His, "Amen" but He says our "Amen" right up front. "Amen, Amen, what I'm getting ready to tell you is the Gospel truth."

What He tells them should either be extremely encouraging to you or extremely frightening to you, frankly. He says, "I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, but whoever blasphemes the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness but is guilty of an eternal sin – for they had said 'He has an unclean spirit.'" The last line there, "He has an unclean spirit" is the key to understanding what this unforgivable sin is. But the first thing you should notice is it says, "All sins and blasphemies will be forgiven." There's a nuance there in the Greek. The nuance is "all sinful acts", which might be a more clear way to write that - that all sinful deeds would be forgiven. I know some of you feel that, statistically speaking, you've done some things, deeds, that can never be forgiven and you can never forgive yourself. Jesus says, "All those things can be forgiven." You ought to ask yourself if you believe that. He says, "and all blasphemies will be forgiven." Every one of us in this room, if you're a Christian, certainly if you're not a Christian, believe wrongful things about Jesus from time to time. "I believe He's not as faithful as He promised He would be. He said He would never fail me or forsake me and I feel like Jesus has failed me and forsaken me. Where are You now?" It's a wrongful thing. Jesus says, "You know, I can forgive that." What cannot be forgiven? It's simply unbelief. It's to attribute to Jesus something that is untrue. Jesus has come in the power of the Holy Spirit and He is casting out demons, and really the problem with this blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is not just wrongful thinking. You can forgive that. It's not just wrongful deeds. You can forgive that. What this blasphemy is about is a proactive willingness to distort your own view and other people's view of Jesus. In other words it's proactive unbelief. In the case of the scribes and the Pharisees, they had two options. They knew He was casting out demons and they could either embrace Him as the Messiah or they could make stuff up about Him. "He's possessed by a demon." By attributing to Jesus something that is not true, by going out of your way not only to not believe but to make sure that other people don't believe, that is unforgivable. If you don't trust the person and work of Jesus, that's the only unforgivable thing. Some people have come to my office over the years, and they've been worried, "I think I've committed the unforgivable sin." I say, "Oh, great. That's a short appointment." They say, "What do you mean?" I say, "If you're worried that you've committed the unforgivable sin you very obviously haven't because the only unforgivable sin is a hardness of heart that proactively goes out of its way to unbelief, and the fact that you're sitting here crying about it tells me that you think it's an issue." You go back to the past, "all blasphemies, all sins will be forgiven." Do you believe that? He's basically telling the scribes, "You guys are pushing it here." They had said, "He has an unclean spirit." They're on the borderline. Jesus is firing a shot across the bow, if you will. "You guys are on the verge of being unforgivable here." Then Mark, like every good person with ADD, just switches to another subject all together – you think. But really, they're tied together. He tells the scribes, "You guys are going to be in trouble by not believing this." The last thing we'll look at is this critical question.

*<sup>31</sup> And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. <sup>32</sup> And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you." <sup>33</sup> And he answered them, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" <sup>34</sup> And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers!" <sup>35</sup> For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother." (ESV)*

If you catch the scene here, you'll find a couple things. One is that it should seem odd to you that His biological family, those who would normally be inside the house with Him are on the outside of the house. The tax collectors and sinners, the broken and diseased, and everyone else are on the inside of the house. So those who

should have been on the inside are on the outside, and those who should have been on the outside by all rights are on the inside. That's exactly how the Gospel works. Then Jesus asks this critical question. The family sends it up, "You tell him his family is outside here to see him." Now, with anyone else but Jesus, that would have been a showstopper because in the Ancient Near East family was everything. In fact, in a lot of evangelical circles family is everything to a sinful degree. (You can just sign the [complaint] letter if you write it, but that's okay.) In the church today and in the church of Jesus' day people tended to make two errors with regard to family. They either viewed family as unimportant or they viewed family as too important. Jesus here is saying, "There is something that is more important than your biological family." When you say something like that to a bunch of Serbians they will say, "You're crazy. I don't care if the mob is after cousin Joe, you take care of him." In the Ancient Near East it was even worse. What Jesus does here is the unthinkable. His family sends that they want to talk to Him and He says, "Who is my family?" He is getting ready to say something big. He looks around Him, at the circle around Him. This actually connects back with His choosing of His disciples. He looks around and says, "Here is my family. Right here. People who left everything to follow me." How do you know if you're in Jesus' family? He says, "Here are my mother and brothers. Whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother." What is the will of God? Is He talking about being good? If you're just a good person are you going to be His brother, sister, mother, child? The answer is, "Absolutely not." When you ask Jesus, "What does it mean to do the will of God?" He says, "The will of God is to believe in Him whom He sent - to believe in His only begotten son and through him have forgiveness." That is the will of God. He says, "Whoever believes that, whoever is obedient to that, whoever has faith in that, that is my mother and brother and sisters." When that happens, you've entered into Jesus' family, which is quite different. About half the people in this room, if you're my age certainly, but even probably under 50, come from a broken family. Every one of you comes from a dysfunctional, messed-up family. You've become a Christian and you find in the church a completely new family. Is that the case? Here's the beauty of the Gospel – once you enter Jesus' family by faith He'll never kick you out. He promises He'll never kick you out of the house.

I was thinking through this and it reminded me of the worst Disney movie I think I've ever seen. In fact, the movie is so bad I don't recommend it. Avoid it at all cost. The only usefulness it has is as a sermon illustration right now. The movie is, of course, "Lilo and Stitch." It's about a Hawaiian family with a little girl named Lilo. Her parents have died and she lives with her big sister, who is constantly preaching to her and trying to comfort her with the virtues of ohana. Ohana means family. At some point they decide they're going to get a cute little puppy, and the puppy, her sister says, can be part of our ohana. The puppy will be an addition to our ohana. Little do they know when they go to adopt the puppy it's really a crossbred alien freak thing. Instead of chewing on the furniture it chews on the neighbors. It's just this nasty thing. The thing tears up everything and at some point Lilo's older sister decides, "That thing is out of here. We're taking him back to the pound." Lilo confronts her with one word – ohana. "You said Stitch was part of our ohana, and what it means to be in ohana is that you never get kicked out." Her sister just rolls her eyes and says, "Whenever things get tough you pull that ohana stuff on me." But you know what, that's the beauty of the Gospel that applies to us. Can you imagine a situation where God might ever be frustrated with you? I can - most minutes of every day. If He thinks (which He wouldn't), "I'm getting tired of Tommy. I'm so frustrated with him. All he does is sin and mess things up. I'm going to kick him out of the house." You have someone there, a brother who puts that hand up with the nail scar and says, "Nuh-uh. Ohana. He's in My family now, and once you become part of My family you don't get kicked out. Once you get taken into My family you will be taken care of and blessed your entire life." Think about that.