


The Gospel of Mark
Part 13
The Unforgivable Sin

TALKINGPOINTS WALKINGPOINTS

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A publication of , the adult discipleship ministry of Triangle Community Church.

Talk together about the glory of God's kingdom. –Psalm 145:11
Love the Lord your God and **walk** in all his ways. –Joshua 22:5

Triangle Community Church aims to be a "transforming church". We exist to be used by God as He transforms ordinary people into extraordinary followers of Jesus Christ. TCC believes not only that life-change is possible—but that it is to be expected. Growth is God's will for his people. But transformation does not happen by accident. It requires intentional, intelligent action. 1 Timothy 4:7 instructs you to "discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness." Since "Talking Points, Walking Points" is intended both for individual reflection and for group discussion, questions vary in degree of vulnerability required. Generally it is best to begin group discussions with questions which involve less personal disclosure—but don't linger there. Be sure to "dive deep" too! The questions which require the greatest openness and honesty, as well as those in the section entitled "Digging Deeper in your Daily Quiet Time", are perfect for private reflection.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

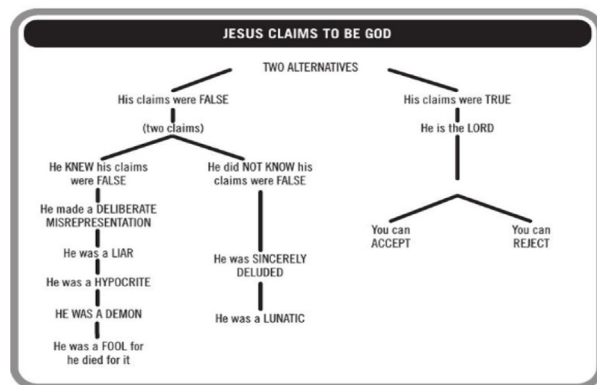
- What from Sunday's message interested you? ...made sense to you? ...confused you?
...intrigued you? ...upset you? ...encouraged you? ...and **why?**
- Review the "trilemma" (see ¶2 of the **Sermon Summary**, along with the accompanying diagram).
Have you encountered this idea before? If so, how did you react to it—with faith or unbelief?
- Read Mark 3:21 & 31-35, then consider these questions:
What do you think was their **motive**? Embarrassment? Fear? Love? Something else?
If Jesus would have come out to them, **how** do you think they would have explained their objective to him?
When they finally heard Jesus' response, what do you think they thought and how do you think they reacted?
- Read Mark 3:22-30, John 12:27–29 and Acts 4:13–17.
Why do you think miracles don't **compel** belief?
What—if anything—can be done to increase the chances of a believing response?
- Whom do you know who needs to consider the "trilemma"? Tell us about him briefly.
Now take some time to pray for opportunity and openness to talk with those friends.

Sermon Summary

Key Text: Mark 3:20-35

This is a very interesting passage. From it we learn how, at least at a snapshot in time, Jesus was perceived by his friends and family and by the Jewish authorities. As we pick up the action Jesus' popularity is at its zenith. But at the same time we are beginning to see growing opposition. Everywhere he went, huge crowds showed up. Clearly Jesus had become a spectacle. To some he was a celebrity, to others, he was public enemy #1. Some saw him as being mentally unstable while others believed him to be an instrument of the devil. Public opinion couldn't have been more divided. In this section Mark directs his readers back and forth between Jesus' acceptance on a superficial level by the multitudes, His disciples' growing commitment to Him, and the increasing hostility of the religious leaders. This passage is interesting for another reason: it mentions the unpardonable sin. Over the years people have come to me fearing that they may have committed this sin. But to determine whether they have or not, you have to determine what this offense is exactly. Today we are going to talk about that as well.

Jesus was so popular that he couldn't even eat a meal with his disciples, without a crowd there wanting his attention. I don't know what to compare it to. Think of some famous athlete or Hollywood star. The fans, the paparazzi are everywhere. Jesus claimed to be God. That leaves us with two logical options: His claims were either true or they were false. If his claims were false—he claimed to be God but he wasn't—you have two possibilities: either he thought his claims were true (which would make him a lunatic), or Jesus knew his claims were false (which would make him a liar and even worse). Or it could be that his claims to be God were true (in which case, he would be Lord!). This is called the "trilemma"; Jesus is either Lord, Liar or Lunatic!



It appears that at this time, his family was opting for the lunatic option (v. 21). Why? I think it was because Jesus seemed to be calling down on Himself, and everyone around Him, the wrath of the Jewish religious leaders (3:6). His family was concerned that when the authorities decided to crack down on Jesus, they also would crack down on everyone close to Him. They saw Jesus as being out of His mind because He was willing to stand up to the Jewish leadership. Of course, at the root of this attitude was unbelief in who Jesus was and what he had come to do. So, they attempted a family intervention! Just wondering. Has anyone ever called you a religious fanatic? Anyone who takes their faith in Christ seriously by actually living it out will be accused of being a fanatic at some point. It is interesting to me that those who are devoted to their favorite sports teams are called "fans," while those who demonstrate their love for and loyalty to Jesus Christ are often referred to as "fanatics"? That's because the world hates Jesus—the real Jesus. The world refuses to submit to his lordship. When it comes to Jesus, are you a fanatic? Does Jesus have first place in your life? Are you seeking to live a life that pleases Him?

Are you taking up your cross daily and following Him in discipleship? Do you openly and unashamedly identify yourself as a Christian? (I once heard someone say that a fanatic is someone who loves Jesus' more than you do! Ouch!) Jesus didn't drop everything and respond to his biological family's request (v. 31-35). He was teaching the priority of spiritual relationships over natural ones. The question is, Do you understand that? Are you living that out? Are you giving priority to your spiritual family while continuing to love and provide for your biological family? Church—look around the room. This is your spiritual family.

Whereas his family was inclined toward the "lunatic" conclusion, the Jewish religious leaders took a darker interpretation. They came to render their official verdict on Jesus and his ministry. This was the most vicious charge leveled against Jesus up to this point and perhaps in His whole life. The scribes did not deny Jesus' power to cast out demons—they just ascribed his power to Satan rather than to God (v. 22). So Jesus tells a little story to show them their error (v. 23-27). In this parable the strong man is Satan. Satan's "house" represents the realm of his influence—this present world, which he seeks to hold secure. Satan's "property" are those hapless victims whom he seeks to control. But the strongest man is Jesus—who has come from God, invaded Satan's stronghold, and bound him. Jesus is pointing out that if He was one of Satan's agents, it would be illogical and self-defeating for Him to cast out Satan's demonic representatives. Satan would then be working against himself! Contrary to the assertion of the Scribes, Jesus was no friend of Satan. He was his worst nightmare. He was the omnipotent Messiah, come to destroy the works of the Devil (1 John 3:8).

Finally, what is the unforgivable sin, and who has committed it (v. 28-30)? These three verses have generated lots of questions and elicited lots of concern on behalf of those who fear they may have committed it. And we should be concerned. Jesus tells that there is an unforgivable sin. It seems to be a sin which closes the door of grace in an individual's life. And you may have wondered, "Have I done this?" Well then, what is the unforgivable sin? It's probably not any sin that you have thought of. It's not murder. It's not abortion. It's not suicide. It's not incest or rape or adultery or homosexuality. The unforgivable sin is reflective of someone who has so hardened their heart, that they not only reject Jesus and his gospel, they call it Satanic. Remember, they didn't deny that Jesus did miracles. They just said that Jesus was an emissary of Satan, not of God. The unforgivable sin involves a self-willed delusion. It is, for the person committing it, a final rejection of the gospel. There is no turning back from this sin. If you are trusting in Christ today, you haven't committed this sin. If you had, you wouldn't be trusting in Christ! If you are worried that you may have committed this sin, and your conscience is troubled, you have not committed it. Your anxiety is strong evidence that you still have the capacity to repent.

You will remember that John the Baptist introduced the Messiah by claiming that someone much more powerful than himself was coming who would baptize people with the Holy Spirit (1:7-8). Jesus depicts himself as that more powerful One, who by the power of God's Spirit binds Satan and defeats him (v. 27). Despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, the scribes claimed that Jesus was motivated by evil rather than by good. Notice the extensiveness of God's grace: Jesus says that every other blasphemy could be forgiven (v. 28; even blasphemy against Jesus himself—Matthew 12:32). Paul himself had been a blasphemer, yet he was forgiven (1 Timothy 1:13-17)! (Jesus' family's accusation that he was crazy was also a type of blasphemy—"speaking against slanderously". And God forgave them. But the scribes' blasphemous accusations were on a whole different level. It was much worse.) The unforgivable sin is committed by someone who, against overwhelming evidence, comes to the settled resolute conviction that Jesus was motivated and empowered by Satan Himself. This is an eternal sin. For it, there is no repentance and no forgiveness. Let me say again, "If you are a Christ follower, you've not committed this sin. If you are stressed out, fearing that you may have committed it, you've not committed it! The person who has committed this sin would be so hard-hearted, so convinced that Jesus was demonic, they wouldn't be entertaining spiritual doubts about their conviction. They are too far gone! And shockingly, this blasphemy was committed by religious leaders, not the local atheist!

Let's close with several observations:

- [1] Faith and unbelief are not explainable solely in terms of outward proofs. Miracles do not compel belief.
- [2] Faith and unbelief are in the eyes of the beholder. Evidence demands a decision from the beholder. Saving faith looks at the person and work of Jesus and judges that it reflects the character and purposes of God. It embraces Jesus. The result—forgiveness and eternal life. Disbelief looks at the person and work of Jesus and judges that it does not reflect the character and purposes of God. It rejects Jesus. The result—God's judgment. These scribes were the poster children for unbelief!
- [3] Those who commit the unforgivable sin are unable to distinguish evil from good or darkness from light.
- [4] While I believe that this sin can be committed today, if you are worried about having committed it, you haven't. That heart-felt concern demonstrates that repentance is still possible.
- [5] Devotion to the things of God often leads others to question our mental stability. You are a religious fanatic! Thank God when that happens.
- [6] If you are experiencing pushback for your faith, know that you are in good company (Matthew 5:12-16).
- [7] Rejoice in the knowledge that Satan is a defeated foe! Jesus, the strongest man, defeated Satan, the strongman.

If you are a Christian, choose to live your life in His service. Follow him in discipleship. Be a fanatic!

Digging Deeper in Your Daily Quiet Time

"Five Question Bible Study" (see below) *is useful for studying any topic.*
Let's use it to understand God's forgiveness...

Monday—Study Ecclesiastes 7:20; 1 John 1:8; Psalm 51:4; 2 Peter 3:9

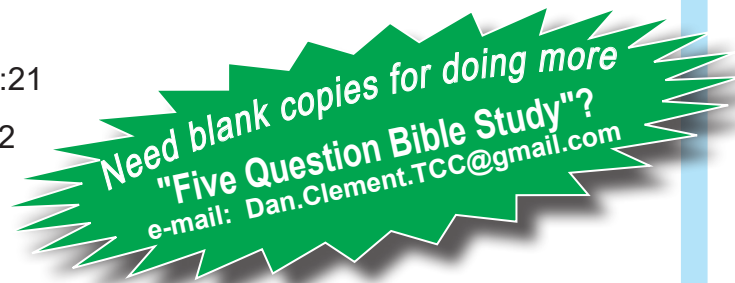
Tuesday—Study John 3:36; Matthew 25:46

Wednesday—Study Romans 6:23; 2 Corinthians 5:21

Thursday—Study 1 Corinthians 15:1-28; 1 John 2:2

Friday—Study John 3:16-17; Ephesians 2:8-10

Saturday—Study Titus 2:11-14



Five Question Bible Study

Bible Text: _____ Date: _____



What idea particularly strikes me from this text? [Note in which verse(s) it is found.]



What question does this text raise in my mind—and how would **this text** answer it?



What about Jesus Christ—his character and/or his redemption—relates to this text?



What action must I take as a result of this text? Be concrete and specific.



With whom will I share what I learned from this text? [and what was their response?]