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 Title: "He is possessed by Beelzebul"  
 Text: Mark 3:20-30 (Gospel parallels – Matthew 12:22-37; Luke 11:14-23)  
 Theme: The charge of demonic activity (3:20-30 [Opposition to Jesus and His ministry increases vv. 20-35]).

### **THE BIG PICTURE**

Second Cycle - Later Galilean Ministry (3:13 – 6:29)

- The choosing of the 12 apostles (3:13-19)
- The charge of demonic activity (3:20-30 [Opposition to Jesus and His ministry increases vv. 20-35]).

Introduction: The teachers of the law accuse Jesus of being demonically possessed and in league with Satan. Jesus asserts the folly of their accusation, reveals he is greater than Satan, and declares that they have no forgiveness for their sin against the Holy Spirit (Mark 3:22-30). Jesus' own brothers try to take him into their custody because they think he is crazy (Mark 3:20, 21).

Some of the fiercest opposition Jesus faced was from those whom He loved the most. Here we will note two groups. This has been called THE BUSY DAY 3:19-5:20 (one day in the life of Christ)

Any time an established kingdom is attacked by an advancing kingdom, open and malicious warfare will take place. The kingdom Jesus brings is an advancing army against the prince of the power of the air. It is a hostile takeover. He is overthrowing the sitting monarchy and setting up His own. Such hostiles are met with open resistance. This is no less true in our gospel narrative.

### **Questions:**

1. Why this inclusion of such violent charges raised again the Son of God by His family and by the religious establishment?
2. What does this tell us about our Lord's cross-work?
3. What does this tell us about Satan and his kingdom?
4. Of which kingdom are you a citizen?
5. To who have you pledged your allegiance?

**To Know:** The Holy Spirit desires for us to know that Jesus has conquered the kingdom of darkness and has brought in His kingdom of light.

**To Choose:** The Holy Spirit desires for us to choose Jesus as our Savior and King.

**To Feel:** The Holy Spirit desires for us to feel the joy of living under the reign of grace.

### **The Eternal Value:**

How important is this passage before us? What I am about to say will sound harsh, but the text of Scripture warrants such strength of words. No one enters the kingdom of heaven in any other way than by a choice of the will. Even in the doctrine of a causative election whereby God picks His people from before the foundations of the worlds were poured, His people must still choose. If you have never chosen Christ, then you are still in a kingdom of darkness under the kingship of Satan. In your non-choice of Christ, you continue to choose the Devil.

### **The Present Danger:**

Matthew (12:30) and Luke (11:23) draw the line in the sand. Sides are chosen and a decision is called for, "He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me, scatters." **There is no middle ground in the kingdom of God. You are either in or out, you are either for Him or against Him, but you are never both.**

### **The Storyline:**

Jesus is King, and His kingdom is overthrowing the prince of the power of the air. He is removing enslaved citizens of darkness and transferring them into the kingdom of light. The story begun in Genesis is coming to fruition in the arrival of the woman's seed, the seed of Abraham and of David. Jesus has conquered sin, separation, and Satan. He has conquered and we are living in His victory. There is energy to this study that we must not fail to see. Jesus Christ is the victor. He has conquered all of His opponents. All who oppose Him will bow before Him.

There are five movements inside our present paragraph. Each assists us in understanding the intent of the text. We will begin in verse 20.

#### I. The confusion of the moment (v. 20)

Jesus Christ was so busy that He did not even have time to take necessary bread. The concerns expressed by His family are real and genuine. They were concerned for His physical and emotional well-being. This same idea is noted in 6:31.

"And He said to them, 'Come away by yourselves to a secluded place and rest a while.' (For there were many people coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat)" (Mark 6:31).

#### II. The concern of His family (vv. 20, 21)

The idea begun in verse 21 is revisited in verses 31-35. Sandwiched between this thought is the accusation of being energized by the devil.

"There was certainly no hostile intent here." (Ralph Earle, Word Meanings in the New Testament: One-Volume Edition, 34).

Why were they concerned? Let us consider three thoughts.

A. They were concerned because He left His employment.

It is safe for us to assume that He left behind His source of income. This same concern is present when anyone gives us a lucrative business to engage in any ministry expression.

B. They were concerned because He challenged those in authority.

Again, I do not believe this point can be understated. The person and work of Jesus set Him against the religious and political establishment.

C. They were concerned because He kept questionable company.

Remember, the crowd He identified with was tax-collectors and sinners. Whatever reputation He had was dubious. He accepted those whom society rejected.

The word "friends" is a translation from the phrase which literally means "those from beside Him." In the papyri of that period it meant "family," and that is probably the best rendering here. This thought continues with vv. 31-35.

The phrase "He is beside Himself," literally means, "**to lose one's mind, to be out of one's senses.**" It is used 17 times in the Greek New Testament with four occurrences in Mark (2:12; 3:21; 5:42; 6:51). It is translated "bewitched" in Acts 8:9, 11 and "to be beside ourselves" in 2 Corinthians 5:13. It is hard to imagine the tremendous pain and hurt Jesus must have felt at such gross misunderstanding by those whom He loved dearly. The thought is staggering.

Jesus shows by His resolve that He cared little for three things.

- He cared little about creaturely comforts (i.e., security). He cared little for what most people spend their lifetime trying to secure.
- He cared little about personal safety. He refused to play it safe. He was willing to do what was necessary for the achieving of the Father's purpose.
- He cared little about the opinion of others. "He had shown that he did not much care what men said about him. In point of act, as H.G. Wells said, for most people, 'the voice of their neighbors is louder than the voice of God.'" (William Barclay, Mark, 76, 77).

How often are we controlled by a sense of security, safety, and opinion?

III. The charge of demonic activity (v. 22)

"The powerful impression recently made by Jesus induced a number of scribes from Jerusalem to come to Galilee for the purpose of counteracting his influence." (Philip Vollmer, The Modern Student's Life of Christ, 134).

"The scribes don't like what he's doing because it doesn't fit into their categories. Jesus isn't accredited. He must therefore be sidelined." (Tom Wright, Mark for Everyone, 37).

Matthew contrasts the question by the crowd, "Can this be the Son of David" with that of the Pharisees, "It is only by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons, that this fellow casts out the demons" (Matt. 12:23, 24). Luke tells us that the religious establishment were always testing Him by demanding from Him a sign from heaven (Luke 11:16). Again, it is necessary to remind us that the historical context was hostile toward Him.

The scribes were deliberately malicious. The Scribes were considered guardians of the Law. They were the true or real teachers of the people. The Scribes required from their pupils the most absolute reverence, surpassing even the honor felt for parents, since both father and son owed respect to the teacher. Perhaps the best known and classic Scribe would be Ezra (7:10). However, as time progressed the order became more debased and corrupted to the point that the Law had become secondary and the traditions of man, primary.

They accused Jesus of being empowered by the devil (3:22, 30). Isn't it amazing that the demons of hell realized who Jesus was, yet the very religious leaders and teachers of the Law accused Him of being demon controlled? Such blindness must have angered the God-man and delighted the devil.

Be-el'zebul occurs in the OT only in 2 Kings 1, a passage Mark has already paralleled twice, in the opening account of John the Baptist, who resembled Elijah, and in the story of the paralytic in Mark 2:1-12.

2 Kings 1:1

Now Ahaziah had fallen through the lattice of his upper room in Samaria and injured himself. So he sent messengers, saying to them, "**Go and consult Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron**, to see if I will recover from this injury." (NIV)

Such references to parallels are common features in Mark.

<http://www.michaelturton.com/Mark/GMark03.html>

"'Baalzebul' reflects the later Hebrew 'Baalzebul' meaning: 'Lord of the dwelling place (temple),' that is, of evil spirits in the New Testament contexts." (John D. Grassmick, "Mark," in EBC, 95).

Their accusations against Jesus were as follows: demons possessed and mad (John 10:20), a Samaritan and demon possessed (John 8:48), born out of wedlock (John 8:41) and a greedy man, drunk and friend of sinners (Luke 7:34). Their accusation was straightforward, "You are not the Son of David, but a servant of Satan."

"In his reply to their charge the Lord emphasizes, first, its folly and, secondly, its wickedness." (Philip Vollmer, The Modern Student's Life of Christ, 134).

#### IV. The challenge to their reasoning (vv. 23-27)

“Jesus doesn’t respond in kind. He doesn’t lash back with an instant label for the scribes. He merely points out the flaw in their thinking.” (Tom Wright, Mark for Everyone, 37).

“The sting of the taunt” – was Christ immune to the taunt and mockery of man? No, He grieved at their rebellion and unbelief.

##### A. The initial premise is stated (v. 23 “How can Satan cast out Satan?”)

He reasons from the greatest to the smallest: Kingdom, house, Satan.

##### B. The initial premise is illustrated (vv. 24-26)

**First illustration:** (24) If a kingdom is divided against itself.

**Result:** that kingdom cannot stand.

**Second illustration:** (25) And if a house is divided against itself,

**Result:** that house will not be able to stand.

**Third illustration:** (26) And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided,

**Result:** he cannot stand, but is coming to an end.

**Conclusion:** If a powerful domain rises up against itself, it will destroy itself.

##### C. The initial premise is clarified (v. 27)

###### 1. The spoiler – Jesus conquers Satan

Greater is He that is in you than He that is in the world (1 John 4:4). Jesus reigns over all things created including the spirit world.

**“Christ came to plunder the strong man’s good – the devil’s hold upon the ungodly.”** ([emphasis added] Augustine, in Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament II – Mark, 41).

###### 2. The spoiled in warfare – Satan is conquered by Jesus

Jesus has “disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him” (Col. 2:15). **The prince of the power of the air sits with alien authority.** Whatever power he has comes to him from God.

“The devil was conquered precisely when he was thought to be conquering, namely, when Christ was crucified.” (Augustine, “On the Trinity” 13.15.19, in Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament II – Mark, 43).

**The one who bound others would now be bound.**

3. The spoils of warfare – Jesus takes possession of Satan’s authority

All things created are under the authority of Jesus Christ. This is His by position and by accomplishment (Matt. 28:18-20; Col. 1:15-23).

**Argument from the Contrary:**

**Case:** (27) "But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man;

**Result:** then indeed he may plunder his house."

**Unstated Contrary Rule:** If one powerful domain overpowers another, it may plunder the domain it subdues.

"When Jesus now speaks about tying up the strong man and plundering his house, we are meant to understand that **Jesus is now acting as the Stronger One**, who has won an initial victory over the enemy (the temptation after the baptism) and is now able to make inroads into his territory." ([emphasis added] Tom Wright, *Mark for Everyone*, 37).

"At His temptation and through His exorcisms Jesus demonstrated that He is the Stronger One, empowered by the Holy Spirit. **His mission is to confront and overpower (not cooperate with) Satan and to deliver those enslaved by him.**" ([emphasis added] John D. Grassmick, "Mark," in *EBC*, 117).

The king has arrived and His kingdom is being established and the dominion and authority of Satan is coming to an end. Perhaps this is what we see in Ephesians 4 where Jesus leads those who were captive free.

- V. The caution against blasphemy (vv. 28-30)

"Jesus now changes His tone. Thus far He has reasoned with the scribes, **now He solemnly warns to this effect.** 'You do not believe your own theory; you know as well as I how absurd it is, and that I must be casting out devils by a very different spirit from Beelzebub. **You are therefore not merely mistaken theorists, you are men in a very perilous moral condition, Beware! Amen, solemn word, introducing a solemn speech uttered in a tone not to be forgotten.**" ([emphasis added] Alexander Balmain Bruce, "The Synoptic Gospels," in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, 1:361, 362).

"The words, 'I tell you the truth (lit. 'Amen [truly], I say to you'), are a recurring formula of solemn affirmation (13 times in mark) found only in the Gospels and always spoken by Jesus." (John D. Grassmick, "Mark," in *EBC*, 117).

**As noted earlier, there is no middle ground in the kingdom of God. You are either in or out, you are either for Him or against Him, but you are never both.** Those who would accuse Him of carrying out the work of the devil have set themselves against the Son of God.

“In the New Testament and in Christian usage blasphemy denotes a condition of spiritual deadness which often manifests itself by expressions of hatred against God and divine things.” (Philip Vollmer, The Modern Student’s Life of Christ, 134).

“His critics had painted themselves into a corner. Once you label what is in fact the work of the Holy Spirit as the work of the devil, there’s no way back. It isn’t that God gets specially [especially] angry with one sin in particular. **It’s rather that if you decide firmly that the doctor who is offering to perform a life-saving operation on you is in fact a sadistic murderer, you will never give your consent to the operation. There is no middle way, for the world today as for Israel then. He is either the one who brought God’s kingdom, or a dangerous madman.**” ([emphasis added] Tom Wright, Mark for Everyone, 38).

The only way for unbelief to be forgiven is through belief. Those who die in unbelief will never be forgiven.

“In light of the context this refers to an attitude (not an isolated act or utterance) of **defiant hostility toward God that rejects His saving power toward man**, expressed in the Spirit-empowered person and work of Jesus. Such a persistent attitude of willful unbelief can harden into a condition in which repentance and forgiveness, both mediated by God’s Spirit, become impossible.” ([emphasis added] John D. Grassmick, “Mark,” in EBC, 117).

Verse 35 tells us that the scribes were persistent in their rejection of Jesus. By rejecting Him, He rejected them with no hope of restoration.

“By reason of spiritual insensibility the heart is rendered incapable of repentance, which is the condition of pardon, and this again is due to the fact that character has become fixed in its choice of evil.” (Philip Vollmer, The Modern Student’s Life of Christ, 134).

APPLICATION: (Where do we go from here? What is the next ACTION STEP?)

1. Do we realize that His kingdom is present and He has overthrown the works of darkness?
2. “Nowhere is Satan cast out but by the stronger. There is no golden age for the world except the reign of Christ.” (Philip Vollmer, The Modern Student’s Life of Christ, 135). We do not Christianize nations by introducing them to our culture, but by preaching and living Christ crucified. The unbelieving will never be converted by the sword nor will the kingdom of Christ come except by the power of the king.
3. Are we living in light of this new kingdom? He is our King, our authority, our master.
4. Have you been persistent in your unbelief? Are you ready to bow your knees before King Jesus?