

“Satan Killer”

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Michael Slayter, Commissioned Pastor
First Presbyterian Church of Kissimmee, Florida

Scripture: Mark 3:20-35

²⁰ Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. ²¹ When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, “He is out of his mind.”

²² And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, “He is possessed by Beelzebub! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons.”

²³ So Jesus called them over to him and began to speak to them in parables: “How can Satan drive out Satan? ²⁴ If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵ If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. ²⁶ And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come. ²⁷ 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. ²⁸ Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter, ²⁹ but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin.”

³⁰ He said this because they were saying, “He has an impure spirit.”

³¹ Then Jesus’ mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. ³² A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, “Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.”

³³ “Who are my mother and my brothers?” he asked.

³⁴ Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! ³⁵ Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.”

Sermon Text

They say the best way to really know a subject is to make yourself write about it as though someone were to ask you to explain it. This passage of scripture has multiple aspects that, initially, do not seem to have any connection. But with some persistence, almost to the point of stubbornness, there are ways to connect the dots. Let's see what we can accomplish today.

Do you remember the comedian, Flip Wilson? What was his favorite line? "The devil made me do it!"

Jesus never said that, but the teachers who were watching had no other explanation, so that was what they laid at Jesus' feet. "The devil made him do it."

So, let's get a better picture of the scene. They were in Capernaum. Most likely, they were at the house of Andrew and Peter. The verses tell us that the crowds were so large, they could not even eat. If you have ever gone to the concession stand at a football game and tried to make it back to your seat, you know what it was like.

But, why such large crowds? Previous verses tell us this was not the first large crowd. It should come as no surprise because here was a man who had healed many folks, one being a paralytic and another was a leper. On the Sabbath, he healed a man with a shriveled hand. When his disciples picked a few heads of grain on the Sabbath, he had a quick answer about the Sabbath being made for man, not man for the Sabbath.

Revolutionary thoughts and deeds! And word travels fast! People were hungry for something, but not sure what.

So, who is this Beelzebub character? I learned that the Hebrew translation of the word means *Lord of the Flies*. I'm beginning to see where movie producers get their titles.

Beelzebub is Satan, the Prince of Demons, the evil one. So, let's get one thing straight; in all my reading and my years as a Christian, I have never heard that God created evil. I know we have all heard about fallen angels and so forth, but we can address the questions of this scripture without resorting to identifying Satan as a small god or some other entity. Evil exists, simple enough.

Evil's power rests exclusively in the ability to deceive. Humankind is deceived only because we cease to love the truth and come first to love and then to believe a lie.

Humankind is not tempted by evil, *per se*, but by something good that can only be obtained at the cost of doing something wrong.

Temptation is a deceitful attack emphasizing the good and minimizing or covering up the evil. Temptation is twisting evil into good; a deliberate, malignant attempt to obscure the truth.

I often wonder if Jesus' critics saw a sliver of truth in Jesus' teaching but chose to obscure it. One way to obscure it would be to give Jesus a label that society would certainly notice and understand. In the first century, labels like 'sinner,' or 'unclean,' or 'barren' carried a clear message. But one of the worst was an accusation of sorcery. He had been casting out demons, so it had to be sorcery, the work of the prince of demons. And so, the argument begins.

How can Satan cast out Satan? Two armies cannot defeat a common enemy if they turn on each other.

And so, what unites them? In WWII, we saw opportunities for the allies to bring friction on each other and it was avoided by strong leadership. Eisenhower had his hands full keeping Patton and Montgomery from strangling each other.

My point is, something has to keep a house united as a family.

So, here is Jesus' natural family, outside on the edge of the crowd trying to take control of their brother and with no understanding of his meanings or actions. Let's put ourselves in their shoes for a moment.

Jesus had siblings and his mother. He was the oldest and one day just packed up and left home to become a wandering preacher. We can assume the carpentry business was in good shape. But he was the oldest of the siblings and tradition has it that Joseph has long since passed away. As the oldest, certain things were expected of him and his actions didn't follow typical family tradition for those times. Remember this is early in his ministry, so his biological family has not had time to comprehend his motives. In this scripture, they want to whisk him out of there like a child who is misbehaving in the supermarket. They had walked about 30 miles from Nazareth. They want to take him home (another 30 miles), put him to bed, dose him with some kind of tonic and hope this whole thing blows over. And he acts like they are not his true family! What an embarrassment!

But, let's cut the family some slack. How many families have a member claiming to be the emissary of God? That's pretty hard to take. They could not believe what they were hearing.

Many of his society, as well, simply could not believe what they were hearing. Was he just another charismatic figure; a pied piper of biblical times? But, fast-forward for just a moment to this century. We have had such people in our life time. Think of Jonestown, or Waco. The main difference between such charismatic men of our time and Jesus was their focus on themselves. They surrounded themselves with pleasures and approval from those in attendance. Whereas Jesus came to be a servant, they came only to be served.

We know that later in the first formation of the early church, the Greeks thought this whole idea of love and forgiveness was absolute insanity. Paul talks about it in 1 Corinthians. He said that with all its wisdom, the world still had not found God. Paul is speaking after the whole message of a

risen Messiah has been clearly revealed. Paul had the whole story to work with. Can you imagine how crazy it must have sounded when Jesus was trying to introduce his message in simple, basic fundamental terms? The sequence of Jesus' life, death and resurrection had just barely started. No one had the complete story. Even so, it was folly to the Greeks in Paul's time and in Jesus' time.

And the Jews just could not swallow it. They were looking for divine signs; something along the lines of Moses parting the waters or a prophet with spectacular God-given powers. Why? Because that was, historically, what they had come to expect of God's actions. That was not Jesus' method, however. You will recall that, so many times, he told folks to say nothing after a miracle of healing because he didn't want to present himself as a prophet/magician.

Something else occurred to me regarding his family's attitude toward him. A man who occupies himself with such out of the box ideas does not just wake up one morning and start talking about it and doing such things. There would have been tell-tale signs while he had been growing up. I am sure you have all known youngsters whose conversations and thinking just did not fall down the middle of the normal bell-shaped curve. And they grew up to be innovative thinkers – or maybe worse. We do remember the story of his side trip to the temple as a boy. Mary and Joseph were greatly distressed over this. I'm sure Joseph was wondering, "What are we going to do with this kid?" I am sure this was not the only time he puzzled them. So, his biological family and the society around him had cause to question his sanity or, at least, question his line of reasoning. He was speaking out about the established status quo, the local government, the temple rulers. Jesus was just asking for trouble. He was, as we say, pulling on Superman's cape.

There were no First Amendment Rights in that place and that time. Imagine what the teachers of the law thought when they saw a crowd so large and so pressing that Jesus and his disciples could not even eat!

But, one thing that stands out in his many conversations was that he did very little 'telling' and a lot more of asking. He answered questions with more questions. I read somewhere that there are over 180 questions from Jesus in the four Gospels.

In normal conversations, there are two reasons to question. One is to gain understanding and the other is to provoke. Jesus wasn't the one with the need for understanding. So, he was trying to provoke people's curiosity, and in doing so the answers came back in a wide spectrum of possibilities – including things that would jeopardize the establishment. He was really stirring the pot!

His questions brought people into a state of uncertainty. All questions do that to some extent and it is not always comfortable. But, uncertainty is fertile ground for growth and understanding. Clarification and understanding never happens unless it is preceded by uncertainty.

But I think our take home message at this point is that Jesus wants us to think, to question, to open our hearts and listen.

He had an odd set of friends. What did your mother always tell you? People judge you by the friends you keep. His friends included fishermen, a tax collector, and a zealot, among others. Everything about him made people suspicious. He hadn't done anything malicious, just worrisome.

He did not seem to care what society thought of him.

I'm not sure what straw broke the camel's back, but apparently his biological family had heard enough and were on their way to tighten the reins and haul in this wayward son and brother.

But Jesus points to those who hear and believe him and says, 'This is my family.'

What unites them? Beyond biology, what makes a family? What makes family beyond genetics? Barclay lists a number of things. He says it starts with common experience; being able to remember and relate to things two

people have been through together. The next thing is common interest, like what we are witnessing here today among all of you. Thirdly, it includes common obedience, or bonding to a common master. One can see this very clearly in a platoon of soldiers, all from different parts of the country, but with one commander. And the last feature he mentions is that of a common goal, such as seeking to know Jesus better. How many of these things do we share here today? Are we not family?

I wonder if Jesus had such things in mind when he referred to his spiritual family. One thing I am sure Jesus was aware of and it was that the persecution of his disciples would continue and persist as a result of following him. In two places within John's Gospel, Jesus speaks of people being banned from the synagogue when they spoke favorably of him. So, let's connect up all of this. Perhaps the best way to roll all these things into one picture is to give credit to the Holy Spirit. Jesus speaks of the strong man in the house. The Holy Spirit is the strong man who guards this house and keeps unity in the family; a strong man greater than the evil one. A strong man who tells us not to fear uncertainty. By way of this strong man, the conquest of Satan is underway because truth will win. And so, to rob your spiritual house, evil must first put the handcuffs on truth.

Another way to see this metaphor is that Satan is the strong man who has control of the house and Jesus defeats him, freeing the people from their bondage to evil. Either way, Jesus, the Satan killer.

Pick the one you like best and either viewpoint will serve you well.

So, what is this unforgivable sin Jesus speaks of? It is something to do with the Holy Spirit. How can there be an unforgivable sin? Weren't we taught that all sins would be forgiven? While we are thinking about this, here's something to remember; if you are concerned about the unforgivable, then you probably have not committed it.

Without the Holy Spirit, there is no message, no understanding, no unity. No wonder Jesus says blasphemy of the Holy Spirit cannot be forgiven.

The Holy Spirit is the means by which we know what we know about the truth of God's Grace.

So long as a man sees the love in Christ, so long as he hates his sin even though he cannot rid himself of it, even if he is in the mud and mire, he can still be forgiven. Even Paul, with all his Christ-like strength, said that he neglects the things he should do and does what he knows he should not do. And yet he is forgiven.

If a person stays in the dark long enough, he will lose the ability to see. By repeated refusals of God's Grace a person will have lost the ability to recognize goodness and the values of good and evil will be seen as reversed.

Such a person will be conscious of no sin and therefore forgiveness would not possible.

But, the good news of the gospel is that through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are forgiven. Thanks be to God.

Amen.