

Jesus: The Conflict Magnet

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Date: 05 March 2023

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[0 : 00] If you have a Bible or phone open, Mark chapter 3, let me just read as a springboard, verse 7.

Jesus withdrew with His disciples to the sea and the great crowd fought from Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem and Edumia and from beyond Jordan.

I wonder what the image that most folks have of Christianity these days. Kind of back in the day, it was a kind of very benign thing, the idea of kind of more tea vicar, you know, the idea of something fairly harmless.

The Christianity was like an old cat that sat there in the city and had purred away, and really as long as it purred away and was quiet and didn't cause too much trouble, then it was absolutely fine.

As of Christianity was seen as being somewhat dull and part of the establishment. These days, I think Christianity has changed in the consciousness of men and women, and it's probably two notches short of a Taliban in the consciousness of many people.

[1 : 12] And so the idea that folk have of Christianity has varied across the time. And one of the things that we're trying to do here at St. Columbus is really just try and get folk back to the sources.

To forget about the mythology, the kind of popular mind of who Jesus is. You know, the Jesus from your Sunday school Bible picture stories, if you ever had one, of some kind of almost refugee from the sixties, some kind of hippie character with a garland of flowers around his neck who spread a lot of everywhere, really like your favorite grandfather.

That's who we like Jesus to be. The Jesus of reality and the Jesus of the New Testament is rather different, isn't he? Because he is someone who is somewhat menacing to some people, and wherever he went, there seemed to be conflict.

And again, you've got that irony that his name is the Prince of Peace, and yet wherever he went, people seemed to have this almost unreasonable hatred towards him.

And Jesus certainly is a very interesting character. People say to me all the time, the church is such a conservative force. Are you absolutely serious?

[2 : 32] Can you look at Jesus of Nazareth and say that he, the most revolutionary person ever, was the head of a force of conservatism?

If you're looking for radicalism, believe it or not, you've come to the right place. Well we may not look very radical behind me is this poopet, which really looks pretty unradical.

I'm told it's designed to look like the exterior of Milan Cathedral. I didn't know that until last night.

Our building is very, very simple. The folk at the door didn't seem to me to be revolutionaries.

And yet what is going on here is a revolutionary movement, and we see that in Mark chapter three.

So that's the theme of this whole section. It is the theme of conflict, isn't it?

You saw last week, look at chapter two, verse 24, there's conflict there. The Pharisees were arguing with them, Lord, why are you picking grain on the Sabbath day? And Derek explained that, didn't they?

[3 : 34] The whole Sabbath controversy. Verse three, chapter three, verse two, they began to accuse him. Verse six is escalated up, isn't it?

It's very sinister. The Pharisees went out immediately, held counsel with the Herodians against them, how to destroy him. So what began as a theological dispute over the Sabbath ends up in verse six as a murder plot.

As you have the Herodians, that was the political side of the government. And the Pharisees, the religious side of the government. So you've got the church and you've got the state.

And then they want to conspire against this 32 year old, fairly quiet, benign carpenter, and they want to kill him. I ask you, are these the words of a movement that's absolutely harmless?

So this whole section is really beginning to get hot, isn't it, as we go through Mark's Gospel? Because what's going on is a challenge to the old order.

[4 : 42] And as we in the church are always doing, we're challenging the old order, Jesus said in the previous chapter, he gave us image, didn't he?

He said it's like sowing a new patch on an old garment. And so what happens is there's a tear, there's a conflict. He changes the image.

He says it's like putting new wine and old wineskins. And so the old is under pressure. That's why we've got the conflict in chapter three, following this image in chapter two.

Because Jesus is not just trying to tweak the old order, he's going to revolutionize the old order. And actually that's the frame of chapter three.

Because what you have in chapter three going on underneath is something very, very powerful. Jesus is saying, you've heard of Israel in the past.

[5 : 41] He's saying, I'm the new Israel. There are little hints, verse seven and eight. Did you read about the crowd there? Well, maybe you didn't notice that it was all that exciting, but it was powerful.

Just a list of names, Galilee, Judea, Jerusalem, Erymia, Tyre and Sidon. But what we actually have there is we've got two things that I find interesting.

We've got, first of all, all the people there from Tyre and Sidon, even beyond. What you have there is a description of the old borders of David's kingdom.

So what Jesus is saying here is, I'm the new David. People from the old kingdom of David were coming together to hear this man. He is the new David.

There's an internationalism there, isn't there? From Tyre and Sidon, it wasn't even within the borders of Israel. Jesus is saying, I'm no longer the guy for the physical nation of Israel.

[6 : 43] I'm the guy for the whole world. So what you have in verses seven and eight is a looking back to the borders of the Davidic kingdom.

And what you have is looking forward to the great commission when Jesus is saying, I'm going worldwide now. I'm not just Jew. I'm Jew and Gentile. I do Tyre and Sidon and beyond.

He appoints disciples. How many? Twelve. Twelve is a kind of significant number in the Bible because again what Jesus is saying, He goes up into a mountain, doesn't He?

Verse 13, He goes up into a mountain and He establishes a new kingdom led by twelve guys. Even anyone who's done Old Testament 101 knows what Jesus is doing there.

He is saying not to replace, we don't believe in replacing, but He is developing the old twelve tribe of Israel idea here.

[7 : 47] So what Jesus is doing is He's creating something new and powerful and lasting. Something that was prefigured in the Old Testament, twelve tribes of Israel.

And yet Jesus is saying, I'm a new David. I am the Messiah. Who does He think He is?

He's the Son of God. Even the demons recognize that. And so He appoints His team, just one little phrase here, look at verse 14, so that they might be with Him.

Isn't that a great description of not just one of the twelve apostles, but that's a great description of a disciple of Jesus. And we as a congregation as a group of churches are called to make disciples of all nations.

We are making a plea, an argument. We are trying to form relationships with folk all over the world to make them disciples. What's that? So that they might be with Him.

[8 : 54] A disciple is just someone who spends time with Jesus, copying them, listening to them, following what they're saying. Christ's like communicators with power.

But this morning we don't have time to unpack every single verse in detail. We're not on a sponsored preach here.

But what we're doing is perhaps looking at these verses, but more particular, look at the last passage there from verse 20 to 34.

And I want you to pick out that idea of conflict and the idea of Jesus as a conflict magnet. Notice three areas of conflict.

Number one is conflict in the family. Look at verse 21. He came home and there was a crowd gathered around him, conflict in the family verse 21.

[9 : 50] And when his family heard that they went out to see him, for they were saying, this is his family, we're saying, he is out of his mind. He's nuts. He's crazy.

He's mad. Two things sparked that off. Number one was he had gathered a crowd. Now, you guys will be experts in Mark by the end of this.

A big theme in Mark is crowds. The crowds kind of appear everywhere. And Mark is very interested in the crowds. So there he is, he's Jesus. He comes in and this isn't normal.

You know, you go home for your dinner and there's thousands of people outside the door. This guy is absolutely mad. And also they have that little note that he hasn't eaten.

He couldn't even eat. He didn't have time to eat. And they thought this was crazy. Just a little sidebar about zeal, isn't it extraordinary that folk say that when you are zealous for Jesus, you're mad.

[10:55] And yet when you're zealous at work, you're ambitious. It's kind of funny, isn't it? How the standards change. You know, if you're in the corporate world, you're working to 11 o'clock at night.

I had a friend in Aberdeen and he was in oil and gas, he was in law. And one of the things that, at 11 o'clock at night, a fax would come through from Houston, Texas and the deal would be settled. And he would say to his friend, do you not live for days like this? Do you not live for the deal after being at work for the last 16 hours?

Nobody says that. It's crazy. Hopefully his wife does. But folks say that's ambitious. That's what you do. And they say, but because he's zealous for God, they say, you're mad.

You're mad. Verse 21. And then we've got that interesting little verse there that they wanted to take charge of him.

[11:55] Now, be very careful when we apply this passage, because we very often apply this as, this is me they're talking about, oh, my family's just like that.

They find it when I'm going to 15 meetings a week when I've done this, that and the other. They say, you're mad. That's not us here.

The problem here is not that we are like Jesus. The problem is that we are like the family. We don't understand Jesus.

They don't get him. So the point is, don't read yourself in here as a victim of verse 21. We are the family who just don't get who Jesus is.

They were always doing this to Jesus. Luke 1, verse 49, he got lost in the temple. They said, where's he gone? He rebuked him. He says, I must be about my father's business.

[12:57] At Cana, the wedding, he rebuked to his mother, John chapter 2, verse 4. What do we have in common? Do you not see I'm different?

Maybe this morning, do we understand Jesus? Are we still scandalized at Him? Do we sometimes think at the end of the day, Jesus is mad and we begin to make demands on Jesus.

We try to control Jesus. It's the other way around, folks. He is sovereign.

He is king. Who does He think He is? He's God, conflict in the family.

In second verse 22, you've got conflict in the family. Verse 22, you've got conflict with religion. The scribes who came down from Jerusalem, verse 22.

[13:57] Now, it's never a good idea when the guys come down from Jerusalem. Trust me. If the boys from Jerusalem come to see you, there is something wrong.

We're a little bit like this in the free church very often when I turn up at a meeting from the mound in Edinburgh, someone is like, what have I done wrong? I've done anything wrong.

The boys in Jerusalem were the real heavies. That is where the Pharisee hard line, hardcore guys lived. That was headquarters. So there was this theological inquiry sent down to see the people there.

Now, there was a thing in those days. It was called a seduced city. It was actually a category. And the folk were worried that the city here, probably Capernaum, was becoming a seduced city.

In other words, it had come under the spell of a heretical teacher. And so the boys from head office come down, theological commission, let's check out this guy, Jesus.

[15:09] Enter the teachers of the law. Now, they say he is possessed by Beelzebub, and by the Prince of Demons, he casts out demons.

That's not a great starting line, isn't it? You are possessed. Now, if the family were hurtful, the religious guys were even more hurtful.

You will find that you will very often get most hurt from the religious people in society than you will from any other group of people. That is a matter of felt experiences, people say.

And so there's a bitter tone. Their words are cutting. He is from Beelzebub. People of a certain age are thinking Bohemian Rhapsody here.

He is from Beelzebub. He's got the devil. The devil is in his tail. Here he is. They could not be more wrong.

[16:13] Again, the greatest opposition to the things of God often come at that time of the greatest spiritual awakening.

Because what we have here are men of the letter, not men of the spirit. They just don't get it. They are guys of the letter. They are people of the rules and the regulations.

And they just do not understand this spiritual movement. He's breaking the law, but they don't realize he is the law.

They just don't get it. So we've got here conflict in the family, conflict from religion. And Jesus uses this conflict from religion to expand in two really interesting bodies of teaching.

Number one, he speaks about the kingdom divided against itself. And number two, he talks about the unpardonable sin. I think they're interesting. Number one, then he talks about the kingdom against itself.

[17:20] He says, how can Satan cast out Satan? You say, you Jerusalem boys, you say that I am from Beelzebub. And yet what are you saying that I've cast out demons?

Are you nuts? Here's your logic. How can Satan cast out Satan? A house divided by itself cannot stand.

Prejudice blinds people to reason. This is absolutely unreasonable. If I, Jesus, hold on, let's get back to the basics here.

If I expel demons, you're saying I've got a demon? No. So often folk who are against Christianity, the reason goes out the window.

Now, again, please, in this church, we are open to critique. We are absolutely open to critique. And one of the problems that preachers very often have is we say things and we assume that everybody will just automatically believe that, well, please give us pushback.

[18:29] Hopefully wait until after the service. Give us pushback, but please make that pushback be reasonable. The pushback here was, I think, driven by blind prejudice.

It's not only Christians who can be narrow-minded fundamentalist bigots. Trust me, I met a few of them in my day.

And secular folk can be equally narrow-minded fundamentalist bigots on steroids. And so what you have is this unreasonable thing which Jesus calls them out.

And then he says something else, verse 27, no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder is good unless he first plunder the strong man, then indeed he may plunder his house.

This is the thing here, look, you take the power of darkness and you take me. And if you're really unobvious way, he's saying, I am God.

[19:36] I'm not a devil. I go right into the heart of darkness. And by my light, I illuminate it, dispelling the darkness.

I go into that ball of the pus of bitterness and I bring sweetness. I go into the very den of the strong man.

And in the cross, I was not defeated. At the cross, I defeated every single power and principality. Do you watch Star Wars?

Never seen it in my entire life. But you have an idea, don't you, there of two almost equal and opposite forces. Now, the Star Wars freaks will say, well, they're not actually equal and opposite.

So he's got that wrong. But that's very often the idea that folk have of the powers of darkness.

You've got God, you've got the devil, and it's two almost equal and opposite forces.

[20:46] No! It's a ruse. Jesus is the strong man. He's king of kings. He is Lord. So that's what he's saying there in the first element of teaching as he is working out this conflict with the religious people.

He says, now get this straight number one, I am God. And then he goes on to talk about this very solemn thing. Look at verse 28 onwards.

Have you ever heard of the unpardonable sin before? Verse 28 onwards, all sins will be forgiven the children of men and whatever blasphemies they utter.

But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness. Whoever has forgiveness but is guilty of an eternal sin.

Now the context tells us what the unpardonable sin is. The unpardonable sin is that when you've got the light of Christ, when you've got the truth of gospel, when you've got Jesus standing in front of you, when you've got the obvious goodness of God, you say no.

[21 : 57] And you actually say what is light, is dark, what is good, is evil, what is Christ. What is light, is of the devil. This is the willful blindness of the obvious evidence of the work of the Spirit.

Now that's unpardonable. Two things that just struck me yesterday about the unpardonable sin, you may or may not agree. Number one is it's more common than not than we often think.

And number two, it is often committed by religious people. I wonder however though, do we focus in the wrong part of verse 28?

Because I think we often focus on the unpardonable sin. But notice how it begins. I say to you all sins will be forgiven the children of men.

Let's just put our cursor over that for a little bit. All sins will be forgiven the children of men.

[23 : 08] This is good news. Folks, have you stumbled off of the street, seeing as maybe as a little diversion from the normal tourist attractions?

Let's go into a little Scottish church service and we stumble in and you hear a message here, look, change your life. And the message is all sins will be forgiven.

Whatever your sin is, X, Y, Z or Z, whatever sin is forgiven, whatever sin you've committed. We're not therapists in here.

We're not managers as ministers. We're not managers of small enterprises. We are men and women who speak a message of absolute forgiveness.

If you're burdened, if you've got a really heavy conscience, folk, there's forgiveness for sin.

[24 : 10] That's the crown of the gospel. The Bible says, so your sins be as scarlet. They shall be as white as snow. Did you see the apprentice the other night?

If you've ever an hour to waste, what's the apprentice? Did you see it was at this exfoliating cream? Not a big user of exfoliating cream myself, but they had it and it wasn't there a problem?

They put it on and it turned folks' faces blue. Unless you're an extra and brave heart, that's not a great look.

And it stained them. Sin stains us. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow, though red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

Yeah, but what about the unpardonable sin? Okay. If you're worried that you've committed it, trust me, you've not committed it.

[25 : 15] If you're worried that you've committed it, that's good in a sense because sin is a concern. But there's another sin which is unpardonable, not because it's not possible, but because it's too late.

Is God speaking to you this morning about your sin, about your relationship to Him? And this is the essence of Mark's gospel.

This is the essence of our message. It's this great liberating good news that there is freedom, that there is salvation for anyone and everyone.

Jesus is the conflict magnet. We've seen number one conflict within the family. We've seen number two conflict with the religious people. Thirdly, finally, and very quickly, verse 31 to 35, conflict is resolved.

Conflict is resolved. Now His mother and His brother, they're standing there and the crowd is saying, and the crowd are saying, your mother and your brothers, they are there.

[26 : 29] They are shouting you, come on, Jesus, come in for your tea. And it's quite dramatic because Jesus answered them.

Isn't it the interesting thing about Jesus is you can tell that someone's bright, not because of their answers, but because of their questions. Jesus said to them, who are my mother and my brothers? Now the problem of Mary and his brothers was they thought that they could control the agenda of Jesus, as we often think that we can control the agenda of Jesus.

But they made exactly the same mistake as many of the Jewish people. They thought that they were fine. We are Abraham's children, Matthew 3, verse 9.

And Jesus is saying, now these folk are not my mother and my brothers. And he looked at those who sat around them and they were a motley crew, some were Jews, some were Gentiles, some were religious, some were non-religious.

[27 : 45] And he said a very radical thing about the New Kingdom. He says, here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.

The family of God, which is a big family, all God's creatures got a place in the choir, something low, something higher.

We are a motley crew this morning. So what binds us together is not tradition, but those who do the will of God.

And he loves and cares for us so much that he calls us his family. I can react again, sometimes that phrase, our church family, because I think it sounds sometimes a little bit culty and a little bit bizarre and weird and kind of still hold on to that.

But in another sense, we are the family of God drawn together because we do his will.

[29 : 04] Two things as we conclude. Number one, there is conflict. Sometimes life as a Christian is, so to poor, nasty, British and short.

There is conflict and there is no way of avoiding that. However, you can bear a lot of conflict if you go home and you've got a good home.

And I hope and pray that in this church, in the church wherever you come from, you will find a good home, men and women, who are your brothers and sisters.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you again for your word, for its energy, for its power, for its relevance. May we this morning find resolution to our conflicts. Thank you for that great word that says that all sins will be forgiven the children of men.

[30 : 11] Lord, speak to our hearts. If anyone here is not a believer, not in the family of God, may they become a brother and sister of Jesus today.

Amen.