

Mark 3:7-35

QUESTIONS

Appointing the Twelve

1. What can you infer from this passage (vv. 13-19), especially v. 14, about the way Jesus disciplined the twelve? How does religious instruction of children in our denomination differ from that of Jesus' discipleship? How about adults?

Jesus and Beelzebub

2. Mark occasionally uses a structure where he brackets one story within another. Here, the argument with the teachers of the law about Jesus' exorcisms (vv. 22-30) is sandwiched in the middle of Jesus' rejection by his family (vv. 21, 31-35). Why do you think Mark did this?
3. What is the unpardonable sin, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit? Note that in v. 30, which refers to the unpardonable sin, "they were saying" is in the imperfect tense, which describes habitual or ongoing action. Why is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, rather than Jesus or God the Father, singled out?
4. Does Jesus make any direct claims about himself in this passage? What do others say about him? Who reject him, and who accept him? Why?
5. Read the quotes about demons below.
 - a. Do you believe in the existence of demons? Is it reasonable to assume that references in the Gospels to demons are simply the way people two thousand years ago referred to various mental and physical illnesses?
 - b. How does this belief or lack thereof affect your life and actions? Is it possible to pay too little or too much attention to spiritual warfare?

Jesus' Family

6. Jesus' family:
 - a. Why did Jesus respond the way he did to the messenger from his family, in vv. 33-35?
 - b. In Amos the chosen people are described as the family of God: Amos 3:1-2a: "Hear this word the LORD has spoken against you, O people of Israel—against the whole family I brought up out of Egypt: 'You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth...'" How would the gathered crowd have taken his words?
 - c. If the criterion for kinship with Jesus is obedience (v. 35), how do we square this with Jesus' statement that all disobedience will be forgiven us (v. 28)?

SOME QUOTES ABOUT THE DEMONIC

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

Eph 6:12-13

Many persons, no doubt, are blind and deaf on account of natural defects; but it is evident that this man had become blind, and had been deprived of the use of speech, though there was no defect in his optical nerves, or in the proportion of his tongue. We need not wonder that so much liberty should be allowed to Satan in injuring the bodily senses, when God justly permits him to corrupt or pervert all the faculties of the soul.

John Calvin, *Commentary on Matthew, Mark Luke, Vol. 2*, on Matt 12:22-24

In one meeting Smith Wigglesworth ministered to two people who seemed to everyone but Wigglesworth to have the same problems: both were deaf and dumb. Wigglesworth put his fingers into the first person's deaf ears and said 'Be opened in the name of Jesus.' He then placed his hand on the person's lips and said 'Tongue be loosed.' The man was healed. He dealt with the second problem in a different manner. He looked the man straight in the eye and said 'Thou deaf and dumb spirit, come out of him in the name of the Lord Jesus.' The person was wonderfully delivered and received his hearing back.

Rt. Rev. David Pyches, *Spiritual Gifts in the Local Church*

If all life is seen as a battle with demons in such a way that Satan and his hosts get blamed for bad health, bad thoughts and bad behavior without reference to physical, psychological and relational factors in the situation, a very unhealthy demonic counter-part or super super-naturalism is being developed.

J. I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*

The commonest question [I am asked about *The Screwtape Letters*] is whether I really "believe in the Devil..." The proper question is whether I believe in devils. I do. That is to say, I believe in angels, and I believe that some of these, by the abuse of their free will, have become enemies to God and, as a corollary, to us... I believe this not in the sense that it is part of my creed, but in the sense that it is one of my opinions. My religion would not be in ruins if this opinion were shown to be false. Till that happens—and proofs of a negative are hard to come by—I shall retain it. It seems to me to explain a good many facts. It agrees with the plain sense of Scripture, the tradition of Christendom, and the beliefs of most men at most times. And it conflicts with nothing that any of the sciences has shown to be true.

C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*

A half-dozen years ago, I found myself attending a Tuesday night Bible study at a little southern church or a hundred regulars... At Bible study that night, my trust reached a crossroads. We were talking about a story in the Gospel of Mark in which Jesus casts out evil spirits. Because I was a newcomer, and also because I studied religion for a living, I was in the habit of paying attention and keeping quiet. But as I listened that night, I slowly absorbed the uncomfortable fact that I was sitting in a group of people who were talking about, well, demons. Finally I couldn't hold back. "Wait a minute," I interrupted. "Does everyone in this room believe in demons?" Their eyes got as wide as mine in the face of such an outlandish question. "Well, sure!" they sputtered. I was stunned. I shut up and listened some more. But privately I thought, if this love thing involves believing in demons, I'm outta here.

Julie Byrne, professor of American religious history at Duke University;
Books & Culture, Nov/Dev 2004, p. 9.