

3 The authority of the Christ (Mark 2:13–3:35)

In what ways are we like Jesus, and in what ways do we need to change?

Learning from Jesus transforms us to be like him (Luke 6:40).

Mark keeps focusing on Jesus' *authority*, the anointed Son who restores heaven's reign to the earth:

- The Spirit-anointed ruler (Christ/Messiah) cleanses the world, pleasing his Father and overturns the reign of evil (Mark 1:1-13).
- Since God's anointed king was here, the time had come for the kingdom to be restored (1:15).
- He has authority to instruct his people (1:22), and authority to drive out evil powers (1:27).
- As their king, he takes responsibility for the sufferings of his people (1:34). He cleanses and restores the people who were cut off (1:42).
- The Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins, that is, to restore his fallen people (2:10-11).

What do you make of Mark's focus on Jesus' authority? Anything for us to learn here? Do you have questions on what we've covered so far before we continue?

3.1 Did Jesus call people "sinners"? (2:13-17)

Like John the Baptist, Jesus believed his arrival meant *the forgiveness of sins* (Mark 1:4-5; 2:5-10). Unlike the Pharisees, Jesus did not use the word *sinners* for people whom they viewed as unacceptable.

Mark 2:13-17 (NIV)

¹³ Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. ¹⁴ As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him.

¹⁵ While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and **sinners** were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. ¹⁶ When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the **sinners** and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and **sinners**?"

¹⁷ On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but **sinners**."

Whenever Israel paid tribute to other powers, it meant they were not free to be the nation under God's reign (e.g. 2 Kings 17:3; 23:33; Ezra 4:18-22; Esther 10:1; Daniel 11:20; Mark 12:14). That's why *tax collectors* were regarded as traitors, helping to

finance the oppression of God's people. The Pharisees named and shamed people like Levi as *sinner*s—people who should be rejected from God's people so the kingdom could be restored.

Here's an example of how the Pharisees prayed. This was written by Pharisees in the century before Christ. (It's not written by Solomon, not part of the Bible):

Psalms of Solomon 17:25-29

²⁵ Cleanse Jerusalem from the nations that trample it in destruction,
to expel **sinner**s from the inheritance in wisdom, in righteousness,
to rub out the arrogance of the **sinner** like a potter's vessel,
to crush all their support with an iron rod;

²⁷ to destroy lawless nations by the word of his mouth,
for gentiles to flee from his face at his threat,
and to reprove **sinner**s by the word of their heart.

²⁸ And he will gather a holy people whom he will lead in righteousness,
and he will judge tribes of the people sanctified by the Lord its God.

²⁹ And he will no longer permit injustice to dwell among them,
and no person who sees wickedness will dwell with them.¹⁷

People like Matthew (tax collectors and sinners) should be ostracised, so people like themselves (the righteous) can have the kingdom.

Jesus offends the Pharisees by sitting and eating with the “sinners,” treating them as people of his kingdom. **Jesus rejects the Pharisees' categories.** The “sinners” are crowding around Jesus, while the “righteous” reject his leadership. Jesus therefore turns away from the “righteous” (i.e. he does not call the Pharisees); instead he calls the “sinners” (i.e. those they judge as unacceptable) (verse 17).¹⁸

Unfortunately, in the last 2000 years, Christians have been quick to use the “sinner” label to get people to do what we want. We behave more like the Pharisees than like Jesus. When Jesus uses the word “sinner” he's usually responding to the Pharisees' label (stated or implied).¹⁹ The only exception is when Jesus applies the label to a group the Pharisees would never have called “sinners”: the Jerusalem temple leaders who were plotting his assassination (Mark 14:41).



Does the way you use the word *sinner* reflect Jesus or the Pharisees?

¹⁷ David A. deSilva, *The Lexham Old Testament Apocrypha: A New Translation* (Lexham Academic, 2023).

¹⁸ Don't swap the Pharisees' categories for later Christian ones. We understand that “no one is righteous” and “all have sinned (Romans 3:10, 23), so righteous = 0% and sinners = 100%. But Jesus was not saying, “I have not come to call nobody but to call everybody.” In the framework of the Old Testament covenant, there were righteous people, e.g. Noah (Genesis 6:9; 7:1).

¹⁹ <https://allenbrowne.blog/2017/08/25/when-did-jesus-label-people-sinners/>

3.2 Should we fast? (2:18-22)

Fasting is often labelled a spiritual discipline. We fast for personal growth, wise decision making, or asking God's help with our needs. But in the first century, fasting was usually communal. The Pharisees assigned days each week when the community should fast, asking God to restore his people as a nation again.

Jesus and his followers were not participating in the assigned fasts:



Mark 2:18 (NIV)

¹⁸ Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. Some people came and asked Jesus, "How is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not?"

John's disciples were fasting for the restoration of God's reign over his people. That was John's main message: the arrival of the kingdom in Jesus the Messiah and the transforming work of the Spirit (Mark 1:1-8). That was Jesus' main message too. So why weren't Jesus and his disciples fasting and seeking God for the kingdom?

Mark 2:19-20 (NIV)

¹⁹ Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them.

²⁰ But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast."

The Torah never commanded fasting, only feasting. Three times a year, the people were called to celebrate their heavenly sovereign at the place where he lived among them (Deuteronomy 16).

When the temple fell and the people went into exile, they fasted because they could not celebrate the feasts. They *turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting* for the kingdom to be restored (Daniel 9:3ff).

After 70 years in exile, the temple was rebuilt and the festivals resumed, but they did not yet have God reigning over them through his anointed (a son of David). Should they keep fasting? They asked Zechariah. He said God was looking not so much for sad faces (mourning and fasting) as for a people who would align their hearts with God's character: "*Administer true justice, show mercy and have compassion on one another*" (Zechariah 7:1-9). Isaiah 58 gives a similar answer.

When the wedding day arrives, it's a day of celebration. In the same way, the arrival of the Messiah is a time to celebrate: "*The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near*" (1:15). After all these years, the king had arrived. The fasting and mourn-

ing were over. That's why Jesus and his followers were not joining in the Pharisees' fasts: this was the day of good news!

But Jesus knew his coronation day was still to come. Before the anointed king is enthroned over his people, he will be *taken from them* (verse 20). He will be betrayed by his own followers and the leaders of his people. The King of the Jews will be executed as he takes into his own body the demise of the kingdom on behalf of his people. That will be a day for mourning and grief and fasting (verse 20).

God was not simply retrofitting the kingship to the fallen kingdom:

Mark 2:21-22 (NIV)

²¹ “No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. Otherwise, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse.

²² And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins.”

When a garment becomes so threadbare that it tears, you can't just patch it with new cloth, for that would make the old garment tear even further. God was not simply stitching the Messiah onto the fallen kingdom established with the Sinai Covenant. The restoration of divine kingship will be a new covenant, not just a patch on the old.

Only fresh skins can hold fresh wine. The dried-out skins from previous years can't cope with freshly fermenting wine. In the same way, the rigid structures of the Torah covenant cannot adapt to the restoration God was bringing to his people in Christ. As Jeremiah said, this is *a new covenant*, more expansive and transformative than the Sinai one (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

The old cloth is torn. The old wineskins cannot adapt to the new covenant. The blood of the Messiah forms a new covenant that extends God's reign to all the earth. We value what God did through his people in the old covenant, but its feasts, fasts, rituals, laws, and customs do not simply transfer to the new covenant in Christ.

3.3 Should we keep the Sabbath? (2:23–28)

The Sabbath was a major area of confrontation between Jesus and Jewish leaders. Observing the Sabbath was not optional like fasting. It was a foundational command of the Sinai covenant (Exodus 20:8-11).

Mark 2:23-24 (NIV)

²³ One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain.

²⁴ The Pharisees said to him, “Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?”

At issue is whether Jesus was breaking the Law and leading his followers astray. Some thirty years later as Mark recorded these events, the question was still crucial for Mark's audience. **Should followers of Jesus keep the Sabbath?**

Jesus was born and lived his life as a Torah-obedient Jew, living *under the Law* (Galatians 4:4). In Jesus' mind, nibbling seeds from the fields as they passed through was not "working." Exactly what does constitute "work" on the Sabbath was (and still is) hotly debated among the rabbis. Jesus does not join that argument. He broadens the topic to Torah observance in general:



Stopping for Shabbat. <https://jeffseidel.com/getshabbat/what-is-shabbat/>

Mark 2:25-26 (NIV)

²⁵ He answered, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? ²⁶ In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions."

These events are from 1 Samuel 21. God had sacked Saul as king, anointing David instead (1 Samuel 16:13-14). Saul refused to step down, and set out to kill David. Running for his life and needing food, David approached the priest at the tabernacle.²⁰ The priest had nothing but the holy bread. By eating the bread consecrated to the LORD, David broke the Law but saved his life.

Here's the fundamental difference in values between Jesus and the Pharisees. To the Pharisees, the Laws were inviolable; human life must comply with the Laws. To Jesus, God values human life, and gave the Laws to support human life. David was right to treat his life as more valuable than compliance with the Law.

Jesus then takes that principle and applies it to the law about the Sabbath:

Mark 2:27-28 (NIV)

²⁷ Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. ²⁸ So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

God did not make humans so there'd be someone to worship him on the Sabbath. God is not narcissistic. In fact, the Torah commands about the Sabbath say nothing

²⁰ 1 Samuel 21 says the priest's name Ahimelek. His son Abiathar escaped Saul's massacre of the high priestly family (1 Samuel 22:20). William L Lane suggests, "Mark may have inserted the reference to Abiathar to indicate the section of the Samuel scroll in which the incident could be located." *The Gospel of Mark*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1974), 116.

about worship; they're about stopping work. The Sabbath was given as a blessing, to benefit people.

Under Pharaoh the people did not have a day off each week. When they asked for a moment to stop and honour the LORD, Pharaoh accused them of being lazy and made their work even harder (Exodus 5). The LORD is nothing like the tyrants who run this world. God gave us a blessed, fruitful creation where we do not need to work seven days a week. When God rested in Genesis 2:3, he was giving creation not a command to obey but a blessing to enjoy.

By contrast, the Sabbath command in the Sinai Law did restrict what Israel could do. The Sabbath law recalled the creational rest (Exodus 20:11) even though the world was no longer at rest (Genesis 5:29). The Sabbath law recalled Israel's experience as slaves needing rescue (Deuteronomy 5:15).

But the Sinai covenant with Israel did not deliver the creational rest that the Sabbath proclaimed. The hope of a-world-at-rest is only realized through the new covenant God made with all the peoples of the earth, as we give allegiance to his Christ. (Hebrews 4.)

Jesus' followers are not required to keep the Sinai Law (Acts 15). We are not judged on whether we observe the Sinai covenant's special days (annual festivals, monthly celebrations, and weekly Sabbaths) since *these are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however is found in Christ* (Colossians 2:16-17).

And that's exactly what Mark is saying in verse 28. As we saw (page 23), the son of man is the human descendant who finally inherits the dominion God gave humans at creation, including the blessing of *rest*. He is therefore *Lord of the Sabbath*, the ruler who ends the tyranny of the beasts and receives the kingdom (Daniel 7), the Son who receives the nations as his inheritance and ends the wars (Psalm 2:8), seated at God's right hand until his enemies are part of his footstool (Psalm 110:1), the one who hands the kingdom back to God his Father after bringing an end to every competing dominion and authority and power, for he must reign until all his enemies are under his feet so creation is at rest as God intended in the beginning (1 Corinthians 15:24ff). This is the Son of Man who is Lord of the Sabbath-rest God always intended for creation.

He achieves all this through the new covenant established with his bloodshed (the cross). He is not subject to the Sinai covenant laws (such as the requirements to stop work on the Sabbath), so neither are his people. As Lord of the Sabbath, he will restore rest to creation. All of us find our salvation, our rescue, our rest in him.

The Sabbath is not a law for Christians as it was for Israel under the Sinai covenant. For us, the Sabbath is the promise of God restoring peace to creation so it ends up being all God intended in the beginning.

3.4 To kill or to heal? What does God do? (Mark 3:1-6)

Ignore the chapter break. Mark continues the theme of Jesus' authority on the Sabbath:

Mark 3:1-6 (NIV)

¹ Another time Jesus went into the synagogue, and a man with a shrivelled hand was there. ² Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. ³ Jesus said to the man with the shrivelled hand, “Stand up in front of everyone.”

⁴ Then Jesus asked them, “**Which is lawful on the Sabbath:** to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?” But they remained silent.

⁵ He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored. ⁶ Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.

Verse 4 is the heart of it. What does God want from his people? To do good, or to do evil? To save lives, and overturn deformity? Or to take lives and maim people?

An experience in the second century BC had changed their answer to Jesus' question. Antiochus Epiphanies IV pressured the Jews to give up their uniqueness and behave like Greeks, so he took advantage of their unwillingness to fight on the Sabbath. This account is from a deuterocanonical book (the additional books in the Catholic Bible):

1 Maccabees 2:38-41 (ESV-CE)

³⁸ So they attacked them on the Sabbath, and they died, with their wives and children and cattle, to the number of 1,000 persons.

³⁹ When Mattathias and his friends learned of it, they mourned for them deeply. ⁴⁰ And each said to his neighbour: “If we all do as our brothers have done and refuse to fight with the Gentiles for our lives and our ordinances, they will quickly destroy us from the earth.” ⁴¹ So they made this decision that day: “Let us fight against every man who comes to attack us on the Sabbath day; let us not all die as our brothers died in their hiding places.”

According to Josephus (a Jew who supplied the Romans with a history of Israel), this change became policy: *This speech persuaded them; and this rule continues among us to this day, that if there be a necessity, we may fight on Sabbath days.*²¹

²¹ Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, “Antiquities 12.277” in *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987), 325.

Mark is highlighting a key difference between Jesus and his contemporaries. According to their values, it is lawful on the Sabbath to fight, kill, and maim their enemies in self-defence, but it is not lawful on the Sabbath for Jesus to make someone whole. And once they've sided with death, they can use that against Jesus (verse 6).

Pharisees and Herodians had very different values. The Pharisees want Jesus killed as a Law-breaker. The Herodians (supporters of Herod) want Jesus killed because an anointed king posed a threat to Herod's reign. This is the first clue in Mark's Gospel of how the story might end.

Some Christians freak out when Mark says Jesus was *angry* (verse 5). If I'm reading the text as all about me, the idea of Jesus being angry with me is terrifying. But the text is not all about me. Anger is a God-given emotion. We feel anger when we see his children being harmed just as God does. Jesus was angry at their murderous thoughts, the twisted belief that God wanted them to kill their enemies—a category that includes Jesus himself! Unmanaged anger can cause us to do evil to others, but Jesus expresses his anger not by doing harm but by boldly doing good in the face of such danger: “Stretch out your hand!” I'm so glad that takes the power from these killers and ultimately gives it to the one who sets all things right.

Jesus was *angry* and *distressed* (verse 5) because the nation called to be a light to the nations so misrepresented God's character. Their stubborn hearts were so convinced that what they wanted was right that if God didn't make it happen, they would! Enforcing our own justice on the world is always pride, never God's justice. They'll find that out when they kill Jesus and God raises him up to save the world.

3.5 The extent of Jesus' authority (Mark 3:7-12)

Since colluding groups were trying to kill Jesus (3:6), he withdrew from Galilee. That doesn't diminish his popularity; it makes him better known in other parts:

Mark 3:7-8 (NIV)

⁷ Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the lake, and a large crowd from **Galilee** followed. ⁸ When they heard about all he was doing, many people came to him from **Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, and the regions across the Jordan and around Tyre and Sidon.**

Put those regions together and you have the full extent of Israel and Judah—the divided kingdom of Old Testament times. Israel included the whole region around Galilee as well as the trans-Jordan regions (east of the Jordan River), while Judah covered Judea and Idumea (with Jerusalem as capital). Tyre and Sidon were on the Phoenician coast north of Israel.



“The Division of Herod’s Kingdom” in Carl G. Rasmussen, *Zondervan Atlas of the Bible*, (Zondervan, 2010), 206

Mark is telling us how far the good news of the Messiah spread. Jesus’ authority extended to the whole land:

Mark 3:9-12 (NIV)

⁹ Because of the crowd he told his disciples to have a small boat ready for him, to keep the people from crowding him. ¹⁰ For he had healed many, so that those with diseases were pushing forward to touch him. ¹¹ Whenever the impure spirits saw him, they fell down before him and

cried out, “You are the Son of God.”¹² But he gave them strict orders not to tell others about him.

Not until Mark 8:29 do people begin to recognize the authority God has given to Jesus as his anointed ruler. But already, the evil powers recognize him. These spiritual forces have been blocking the kingdom of God from functioning on earth, so they're terrified of the authority Jesus is exercising as he sets people free from afflictions and releases them from demonic control. Jesus does not want their testimony.

3.6 Why twelve male apostles? (Mark 3:13-19)

By appointing twelve ambassadors for the kingdom of God, Jesus is beginning to restore heaven's government to the nation that has been oppressed for 600 years:

Mark 3:13-19 (NIV)

¹³ Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. ¹⁴ He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach ¹⁵ and to have authority to drive out demons.

¹⁶ These are the twelve he appointed:

Simon (to whom he gave the name **Peter**),

¹⁷ **James** son of Zebedee and his brother **John** (to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means “sons of thunder”),

¹⁸ **Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James** son of Alphaeus, **Thaddaeus, Simon** the Zealot

¹⁹ and **Judas Iscariot**, who betrayed him.



Why twelve? And why all males?

Jacob's twelve sons effectively became the twelve tribes of Israel. They tried living under God's leadership through tribal leaders (Judges), but eventually asked for a king to lead them and repel their enemies. After Solomon's death, the kingdom split. Eventually the kingdoms of Israel and Judah both fell. The prophets promised the restoration of the LORD'S reign over the tribes of Israel and Judah (e.g. Zechariah 9:1; 10:6), the restoration of *all Israel* (a phrase occurring 47 times in 1–2 Chronicles, e.g. 2 Chronicles 30:1, 5, 6).

The Messiah's immediate responsibility was to lead his own people. With no one to lead them, they had spread all over the Mediterranean world: *harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd* (Matthew 9:36). Jesus chose **twelve** as a symbol of restoring the twelve tribes of Israel. Initially, he sent them only to *the lost sheep of the house of Israel* (Matthew 10:6).

This initial restoration work was part of the Old Covenant. That covenant was thoroughly patriarchal from the start. There is no way Jesus could have appointed women for work, to represent the restoration of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Later, when Jesus dies as King of the Jews and is raised up as Lord of heaven and earth, establishing a new covenant in his blood, the restrictions of the Old Covenant no longer apply. The new covenant unites us as one people in the Messiah. Ethnic divisions (Jew/gentile) no longer apply. Patriarchal gender divisions (male/female) no longer apply. Social status divisions of human society (slave/free) no longer apply. The whole creation is being restored in the resurrected Messiah, so *there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Messiah Jesus* (Galatians 3:28).

That's why the day that founded the new covenant (resurrection day), Jesus sends women as the first gospel messengers (John 20:1-17). The old divisions no longer apply.

In summary, Jesus chose twelve males to symbolize the restoration of Israel's fallen tribes. Now he leads all the peoples of the earth, regardless of gender, ethnicity or social status, commissioning us all with the good news that he is Lord of all.²²

3.7 Why did his family try to stop Jesus? (Mark 3:20-35)

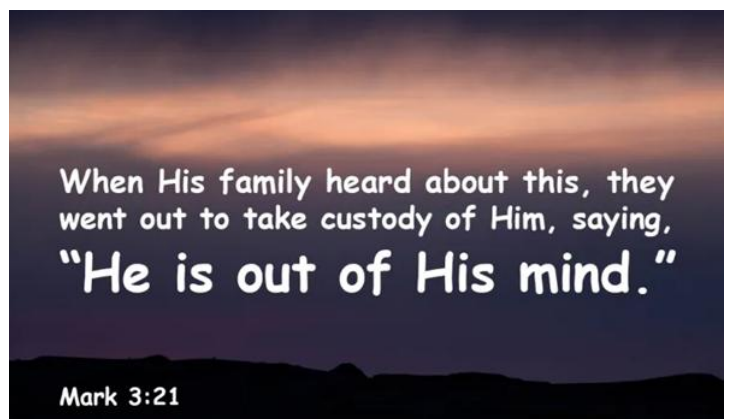
One of the saddest moments in Mark's Gospel is when Jesus' own family tries to terminate his ministry:

Mark 3:20-21 (NIV)

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."

Jesus' family arrived *to take charge of him* (NIV). The word implies the use of force: *to seize him* (ESV), *to take custody of him* (NASB), *to restrain him* (NRSV).

The family's attempt to stop Jesus has the backing of the highest level of Jewish society. Bible scholars from the temple in Jerusalem travelled to Galilee to ensure Jesus was sent home with his family:



²² For more detail, see <https://allenbrowne.blog/2017/09/25/why-did-jesus-appoint-12-apostles/> and <https://allenbrowne.blog/2017/09/27/why-no-women-among-jesus-apostles/>

Mark 3:22 (NIV)

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

The meaning of *Beelzebul* is unclear, but the parallel phrase (*prince of demons*) makes it clear the Bible scholars are talking about Satan. They say that Jesus' authority to order the demons around comes directly from the top—from the prince of demons. According to these scholars, Jesus is not God's anointed Messiah sent to restore the kingdom of God; he's a tool of the devil to keep the house of Israel enslaved.

Mark 3:22-30 (NIV)

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.”

Jesus says the Enemy would be fighting against itself if it was driving demons out of the people of God. So many kingdoms throughout history have been destroyed by internal fighting (verse 26).

What is the **unforgivable sin**? What is *blasphemy against the Holy Spirit* (verse 29)? Why raise this topic in this context?

The Jerusalem scholars just accused Jesus of being a Satanic agent. Speak against Herod and he'd imprison or decapitate you (1:14; 6:27). Slander Pilate and he'd run you through with a sword.

But Jesus is a very different kind of king. Despite their treason against his leadership, Jesus offers them a pardon: *people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter* (verse 28).

They can say what they like about him and be forgiven (astounding!). However, Jesus warns that God cannot rescue them if they keep resisting his Holy Spirit God. It's the cleansing Spirit of God who regenerates us as we place our trust in Messiah Jesus, but where the Holy Spirit finds no faith in Christ there is no forgiveness. The good news is that the King is giving them time to turn and trust the good news.

Now Mark returns us to the story of the family that had come to take Jesus away:

Mark 3:31-35 (NIV)

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."

What's the common ground between the family that wants to forcibly take Jesus home and the Jerusalem scholars who portray Jesus as an enemy agent? It's not hard to imagine how they may have colluded.

In Jewish culture the oldest son has responsibility to look after the family and take care for his mother if the father is no longer around. Instead, Jesus is off with his mates travelling around Galilee. He has left his brothers and sisters to fulfil what they regard as his responsibility. If they feel disaffected, it wouldn't take much prompting from the Jerusalem scholars to convince them that they would be doing the right thing by taking their older brother home and forcing him to look after the family. They even bring Mary as Exhibit A: the widow the oldest son is failing to care for.

The plan is to turn up unannounced and interrupt Jesus while he speaks. He'll come out to find out what the problem is, maybe Mary's health or the death of a relative. If he doesn't respond to them, everyone will see Jesus failing to care for his family.

Jesus does not come out to attend to his family. Instead, he reframes what *family* means. Jesus is not rejecting his mother or his brothers (compare John 19:26; 1 Corinthians 15:7). What he is doing is redefining family to include everyone who belongs to his Father in the heavens. His brothers and sisters have not understood the extent of the family responsibility entrusted to Jesus. The son of man (descendant of humanity) has authority to care for the whole human family.

3.8 Conclusion

In his life, ministry, death, and resurrection, Jesus was straddling two covenants.

- He was God's Messiah for the Jewish nation, the kingdom founded at Sinai that had fallen and was waiting for God to restore.
- At the same time, he was laying the foundation for the new covenant established in his blood, the covenant that restores the whole earth as a kingdom of heaven.

So, we don't just import elements from the Sinai covenant into the new covenant: our treatment of sinners, fasting, the Sabbath, and the twelve male apostles, for example.

How are you doing when it comes to recognizing how Jesus's ministry addresses both covenants, that elements of the old cannot simply be patched onto the new?

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Mark's main theme seems to be Jesus' *authority*. Is that a big deal for you? How important is it for us to call people today to recognize the authority of the Christ?

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What else strikes you from these chapters?

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In preparation for next week, **read Mark 4–5.**