

First Serve

Studies in the Gospel of Mark

Text

Mark 3:22-35

Topic

Jesus likens His display of power and authority
over the devil to binding a strong man
in order to enter his house and plunder his goods

Title

"It's a Plunderful Life"

Introduction

Sing with me, if you know the words:

*Yo, ho, yo ho, a pirate's life for me.
We pillage, we **plunder**, we rifle, and loot,
drink up me hearties yo ho!
We kidnap and ravage and don't give a hoot,
drink up me hearties yo ho!*

To which we all say, "Arrr!"

No, it isn't National Pirate Day. The word "plunder," however, is prominent in the verses we will discuss today. Jesus uses the word to describe His confrontations with the devil.

Is Jesus a pirate? Of course not. But since we almost can't help but associate the word "plunder" with pirates, I thought it best to get it out of our system right at the beginning.

In a very descriptive illustration, Jesus says, "No one can enter a strong man's house and **plunder** his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. And then he will **plunder** his house" (v27).

Satan is the "strong man" Jesus was describing. His "house" is the world. His "goods" are, primarily, human beings whom he holds captive and beats mercilessly as slaves.

Jesus claimed He had "bound" Satan in order to free those he held captive.

He more than claimed it. He demonstrated it, by casting out demons and making people whole.

Mark then adds a passage about Jesus' mother and brothers. It seems a little out of place, but it isn't. It's right where it belongs, because in those verses Jesus talks about those who constitute His spiritual family who live in what the Bible elsewhere calls "the household of faith."

We'll look at both the devil's *house* and at the *household* of faith. I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Houses To Plunder Await You In The World, and #2 A Household Of Wonder Equips You In The Lord.

#1 Houses To Plunder Await You In The World

(v22-30)

Jesus had been putting on a mighty display of power and authority over demons by casting them out of any and all who were possessed.

Jesus also encountered folks whose afflictions were attributed directly to the devil. He healed them.

No one could deny the results. People were set free and made whole.

You'd think the universal reaction to ending so much human suffering would be rejoicing. It wasn't.

Mar 3:22 And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, "He has Beelzebub," and, "By the ruler of the demons He casts out demons."

Notice these "scribes" were from Jerusalem. The local scribes had not had any success refuting Jesus, so they radioed headquarters for help.

The religious leaders were no help to the people. In fact, in one place Jesus says they made things worse by heaping burdens upon already burdened people, then offering them no help in bearing them.

It's one thing to not have the ability to cast out demons and heal those afflicted by them. But it's just wrong to oppose the Person Who was going about doing those things.

Faced with the facts, they came up with the idea that Jesus "has Beelzebub." The phrasing means they thought He must Himself be working for "Beelzebub," whom they understood to be "the ruler of the demons."

There are a ton of interpretations regarding just who Beelzebub really was, and what the name really means. All we need to know is that the Jews used the name as a description of "the ruler of the demons."

By "ruler" they didn't necessarily mean that Beelzebub controlled the demons. The word can mean that he was the most powerful of them.

The scribes were suggesting that there was a conflict among demons, with Beelzebub on the offensive against lesser demons. He was, they argued, using Jesus to vanquish the lesser demons.

Truth is, the Jews had a very limited knowledge of things demonic. In their Scriptures - what we know as the Old Testament - references to Satan and to demons do not appear together in a single passage. It is not at all clear that Satan is their leader.

The New Testament takes it for granted there is a close relationship between Satan and demons. They are frequently represented as a hierarchy over which Satan rules.

But a first century scribe might have thought Beelzebub was making a move on the other demons - casting them out, so he could take over their realm.

Thus the scribes were ignorant, not stupid. Their accusation made sense to them.

It's a far more sinister false accusation, therefore, than we normally might think. In the mind of the average Jew in that period, with their limited knowledge of demons, what the scribes were accusing Jesus of could make sense.

Mar 3:23 So He called them to Himself and said to them in parables: "How can Satan cast out Satan?"

Packed into this opening question is a totally new demonology for the Jews. Jesus said that the demon they were calling the prince of the demons is none other than Satan, and that the demons Jesus had been casting out are under Satan's direct authority.

We take that for granted, because we have the complete Bible. But this was revolutionary to Judaism.

Jesus, of course, had inside information about all this. He had seen Satan fall from Heaven, and take one-third of the angels with him in his rebellion. He spoke with authority about the supernatural realm.

Mar 3:24 If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand.

Mar 3:25 And if a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand.

Mar 3:26 And if Satan has risen up against himself, and is divided, he cannot stand, but has an end.

There was no hostile demonic take-over in progress. There was, instead, a Satanic kingdom, ruled over by the devil and administrated by his loyal, subordinate demons.

Not only was there no kingdom-wide civil war, there was no insubordination at the "house" level, meaning that individual demons who possessed and afflicted people were totally loyal to Satan.

Jesus' power and authority was *not* from Satan rising up against himself. It was from Jesus having power and authority over the devil and his kingdom.

Mar 3:27 No one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. And then he will plunder his house.

It helps our appreciation of this illustration to know that one of the possible definitions of Beelzebub is *master of the house*. The Jews were right; there was a master of the house. But it wasn't Jesus; it was Satan.

Jesus portrayed Himself as the One who could, and did, bind Beelzebub, the master of the house.

Just exactly when did Jesus bind Satan? I'd trace it back to the temptation in the wilderness where, in one-on-one, champion vs. champion spiritual combat, Jesus defeated Satan. He emerged victorious from there and every time He encountered a demon, or a legion of them, He cast them out - proving the strong man was bound.

Having bound Satan, i.e., having defeated him, Jesus could "plunder his house." Every person freed from possession or demonic affliction was a plunder - was a recovered spoil of spiritual warfare - that Jesus removed from Satan's influence and control.

Is Satan bound today? Sadly, no. He is presented in the New Testament as the god of this age (Second Corinthians 4:4) and the prince of the power of the air (Ephesians 2:2).

We are clearly told that he goes about as a roaring lion, seeking people to devour (First Peter 5:8).

We are told that people are taken captive by him to do his will (Second Timothy 2:26).

What happened? How did he escape his binding by Jesus?

He was let loose because the Jewish leaders ultimately rejected Jesus as their savior and messiah. Jesus called it the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit.

Mar 3:28 "Assuredly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they may utter;
Mar 3:29 but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation" —
Mar 3:30 because they said, "He has an unclean spirit."

These words strike fear into the hearts of sincere believers. Christians wonder if they have committed this terrible sin.

Have they? Can they? Let's look at what Jesus meant in context.

Remember that Jesus was offering to inaugurate the kingdom of God on the earth that had been promised to Israel.

- God the Father sent John the Baptist to prepare the nation for the coming of their Messiah. Multitudes of the common people responded to John's call and repented, but the religious leaders permitted John to be arrested and eventually killed.
- God the Son came as promised and called the nation to trust Him, but those same religious leaders asked for Jesus to be killed.
- The Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, empowering Jesus' disciples. How did those same religious leaders respond? By arresting the Apostles, ordering them to keep silent, and then killing Stephen themselves.

Stephen told them what their sin was: "You do always resist the Holy Spirit" (Act 7:51). They had sinned against the Father and the Son, but had been graciously forgiven. When they sinned against the Holy Spirit, they had hardened their hearts to a point of no repentance and there could be no more forgiveness.

The apostle Paul would thus say to them about this point of no return, at the end of the Book of Acts,

Act 28:25 ..."The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers,
Act 28:26 saying, 'GO TO THIS PEOPLE AND SAY: "HEARING YOU WILL HEAR, AND SHALL NOT UNDERSTAND; AND SEEING YOU WILL SEE, AND NOT PERCEIVE;

Act 28:27 FOR THE HEARTS OF THIS PEOPLE HAVE GROWN DULL. THEIR EARS ARE HARD OF HEARING, AND THEIR EYES THEY HAVE CLOSED, LEST THEY SHOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES AND HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, LEST THEY SHOULD UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEARTS AND TURN, SO THAT I SHOULD HEAL THEM." ' '

Act 28:28 "Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!"

Israel's leaders had thereby blasphemed the work of the Holy Spirit, hardening their hearts to a place they would not repent. The offer of the kingdom was now off the table.

Satan was thereby released and we entered the church age where we await a Second Coming of Jesus. That Second Coming is preceded by the resurrection and rapture of the church, and the seven-year Tribulation on the earth.

At the Second Coming, Satan will be taken into custody and be bound and imprisoned for the thousand-year duration of the kingdom of heaven on the earth.

In context, it was Israel's leadership who committed the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit by ultimately and utterly rejecting Jesus, attributing to the Holy Spirit the works of the devil as their excuse.

Scholars debate whether or not the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is a sin that can be committed today. Many good Bible teachers say that it cannot be committed today because it involved Israel as a nation rejecting the Messiah, and that's something that isn't repeatable.

Evangelicals who say the sin still can be committed typically explain that, since the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is a total, final rejection of Jesus, it is committed when a person dies without receiving Jesus as their Savior. Since it is the work of the Holy Spirit to bear witness to every human heart of their need for salvation, and the provision of the Savior, when a person dies without Jesus, they have effectively blasphemed the Holy Spirit.

It's therefore a sin that can't be committed while you are alive. It kicks-in if you die in your sins, without the righteousness of Jesus.

Pastor and author Warren Wiersbe wrote,

The only sin today that God cannot forgive is rejection of His Son (Joh 3:16-21, Joh 3:31). When the Spirit of God convicts the sinner and reveals the Savior, the sinner may resist the Spirit and reject the witness of the Word of God, but that does not mean he has forfeited all his opportunities to be saved. If he will repent and believe, God can still forgive him. Even if the sinner so hardens his heart that he seems to be insensitive to the pleadings of God, so long as there is life, there is hope. Only God knows if and when any "deadline" has been crossed. You and I must never despair of any sinner (1Ti 2:4; 2Pe 3:9).

That brings us to the application of these verses to us, today. The world is the devil's kingdom, and everywhere we look there are houses in which he holds people captive. Their lives are full of misery for lack of the knowledge and the presence of God; and they are on a slippery path leading to an eternity separated from God suffering eternal conscious torment.

Satan is not bound, but we are told that greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world. We therefore can still plunder.

In fact, it's our mission to plunder the strong man's house and set free those he holds captive.

The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation.

1. First it is the power by which a person is saved. God's grace works on their hearts to free their will in order that they might make a decision for Jesus.
2. Second it is the power of being indwelt by God the Holy Spirit to live a life pleasing to God - life as it was meant to be lived. You plunder houses by living for Jesus - by being Christ-like - and by encouraging others to have their sins forgiven and be saved while they still have the opportunity.

#2 A Household Of Wonder Equips You In The Lord

(v31-35)

The remaining five verses of chapter three seem tacked on, almost out of place, a footnote at best. But I think we will see otherwise.

Earlier in the chapter, Mark had said that "when His own people heard about this, they went out to lay hold of Him, for they said, "He is out of His mind" (v21). He left off from that to describe the Beelzebub controversy, and now returns to it to let us know that "His own people" were members of His own birth family.

I suggest to you there is more here than a clarification. Jesus said something radical that resonates through the entire church age.

Mar 3:31 Then His brothers and His mother came, and standing outside they sent to Him, calling Him.

Who are these "brothers?" I told you last week that there is a disagreement between Protestants and Roman Catholics over their identity:

- The Roman Catholic Church teaches the perpetual virginity of Mary. They say she never had sex with her husband, Joseph, and never had any other children. They argue that this word for brothers can mean other relatives, like cousins.
- We say it is extra-biblical and absurd to say that Mary remained a virgin. These are Jesus' brothers - the children born to Joseph and Mary after the Lord was born.

BTW The Catholic Church also teaches the Immaculate Conception of Mary. They mean that Mary, even though born of human parents, was nevertheless conceived without original sin or its stain. That is what "immaculate" means - *without stain*.

The Gospel of Mark 6:3 and the Gospel of Matthew 13:55-56 state that James, Joseph, Jude, and Simon were the brothers of Jesus. The same verses also mention unnamed sisters of Jesus.

Another verse in the letter to the Galatians (1:19) mentions seeing James, "the Lord's brother."

The "brothers of the Lord" are also mentioned, alongside (but separate from) Peter and the apostles in First Corinthians 9:5.

Regarding Mary, this is the only place in the Gospel of Mark where she is seen. She comes with Jesus' brothers because they believe He has gone insane. This is an attempted mental health intervention.

Mary didn't understand, not fully, who Jesus was, and what was His mission. Obviously, she was not yet a believer; she was not, at that point, saved.

Even if you want to concede (which you don't) that these may have been cousins, Mary comes off badly - as a nonbeliever who was seeking to undermine the Gospel.

Jesus' family members could not press through the crowd. Even though they were family, no preferential treatment was shown to them.

They got a message to Jesus.

Mar 3:32 And a multitude was sitting around Him; and they said to Him, "Look, Your mother and Your brothers are outside seeking You."

Mom and the boys had come. It would seem natural for Jesus to take a break, to take five, and see His family.

Everything surrounding Jesus was strategic. In this case, to yield to His family, even momentarily, could be construed by Jesus' enemies as showing they were right, and that He was, indeed, one brick shy of a full load.

Two rungs short of a ladder. Not playing with a full deck. You get the idea.

Mar 3:33 But He answered them, saying, "Who is My mother, or My brothers?"

That's unexpected. It put the crowd on alert that following Jesus meant a change in one's attitude toward natural family ties.

It was one thing for a disciple to leave everything to follow Jesus. But He had only called upon twelve guys to do that. I'm sure everyone else thought life was business as usual, with family always coming first.

Mar 3:34 And He looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him, and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers!

Mar 3:35 For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother."

These are radical words in any culture, but certainly in the Jewish culture. Jesus wasn't advocating abandoning family, but He was making it clear that the will and the work of God takes priority even over family.

Let me take a moment to qualify that. Too often people use this as an excuse to ignore their responsibilities to their family. Pastors and Christian workers especially get so into their ministry to others that they neglect their families.

They forget that treating your wife like Jesus treats the church, and raising your kids in the Lord, IS your ministry.

Jesus' comments are not an excuse to disobey the clear teaching of the Bible about the home.

A better application of this is to consider your own nonbelieving family. Are you willing to take a stand for Jesus in your nonbelieving family?

Will you do the will and the work of God? Or are you prone to spiritual compromise because, after all, it's family?

Everyone must answer those questions for themselves. Just be honest in asking and answering them. Don't under-estimate the pressure of your family, and the fact they can be used by the devil to undermine your witness for the Lord.

On the plus side, as a believer in Jesus, you gain a whole new family. When you are saved, you are born-again. With that spiritual birth comes membership in the family of God, and brothers and sisters and mothers galore.

Have you ever been accused, by your natural family, of loving believers more than them? I hope you have.

Notice Jesus doesn't mention fathers. Although it's OK to see certain believers as spiritual fathers to you, especially if they were used to bring you to Jesus, the Lord was emphasizing that we all have one Father, His Father, God the Father.

Our new spiritual family is the church. Not the building, but the believers.

Isn't that wonderful? Maybe you're a single mom. You're not alone! You've got believers to come alongside and be sisters and brothers and mothers. You can have as much, or as little, of their help as you want or need, simply by living in community with others in the church.

I'm calling the church a household of wonder. The more you think about it, the more you, too, will see the wonder of our relationship with Jesus Christ, and then with one another in a spiritual community.

I know, I know; you've been burned or spurned somewhere along the line by some church. Or you know someone who has.

Of course you have; that's bound to happen, because the church is comprised of flawed people - including, and sometimes especially, me and you.

Work through it. God has provided the necessary tools; and what a wonder **they** are. Repentance, forgiveness, grace and mercy in abundance. Prayer. The Word of God. The gifts of the Holy Spirit.

We are told to not forsake assembling together as the church. It's where we come together to get equipped to go out and be able to more effectively plunder the strong man's goods.

So, yes, it **is** a plunder-ful life, as we get equipped to go out and evangelize, setting free those held captive by the devil.