

*Where we start . . .*

It happens from time to time in many business settings. Some “newbie” comes on the scene and speaks to a long-existing problem in the company. And, once the observation is made, everyone now sees it. Why is it hard for those deeply involved to see what the “newbie” sees?

*What we read . . .*

Apparently, some of those who should have known differently didn't see things clearly. That is what Mark captures for us in 3:20-35. The opening and closing pieces of this section highlight Jesus' family while the center section focuses on the religious leaders.

What is the basic concern that Jesus' family has for Him?

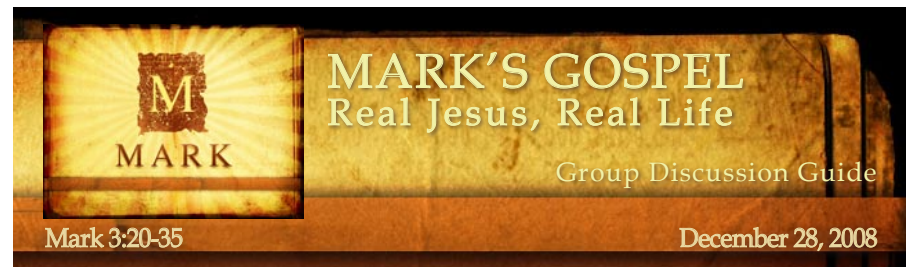
What is the basic charge raised by the religious leaders against Jesus?

What stands out to you about how Jesus responds to the radical misunderstandings that both these groups of people have about Him?

It would seem that those who either knew Jesus best (His family) or knew the Scriptures best (the religious leaders) would be those most likely to recognize who Jesus was and what God was doing in and through Him. But apparently this wasn't the case. What kinds of things might have contributed to the inability of both these groups to see Jesus clearly?

*Why this matters . . .*

What can help us guard against drawing our own wrong conclusions about Jesus (either because we think we “know Him” or because we are so sure of what we think God is up to)?



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*Diving in . . .*

It seems almost inevitable; some people will draw wrong conclusions about Jesus. What is startling is that some of those we assume would know better are the ones who end up so wrong about Jesus. As we will see this week, those who apparently knew Him best personally (His family) and those who apparently knew Scripture best (the religious leaders) ended up with serious misunderstandings about Jesus. This serves as a cautionary tale for us. We can all too easily assume that because we have been around Jesus for a long time or because we have such a good understanding of Scripture that we are in the place of assessing what Jesus should do and how He should be understood. The truth is, Jesus defies any “assessment” we make of Him. He is . . . well, He is exactly and only who He is!

*Discussing . . .*

As Mark unfolds his account of the life and ministry of Jesus, we have seen the opposition to Him grow. At this point, Jesus’ life is not in peril; although the religious leaders, in particular, seem intent on shutting down what He is doing.

Mark inserts into the flow of his account a glimpse of how some who should have known better have come to entirely wrong conclusions about Jesus. The section we look at is something of a “sandwich.” The section opens with a mention of Jesus’ family, gives us an exchange between Jesus and the religious leaders, and then returns to the family of Jesus. Because of the tight thematic links between these three short sections, it seems that Mark intends for us to take them together—as a sandwich.

As you discuss the passage, you may have to separate the slices. Talk first about Jesus’ family and their concerns. Then you can turn your attention to the religious leaders and their charge. Finally, try and assess what is common to each of these individual pieces. What is the big picture that Mark wants us to see?

The family’s concern is that they think Jesus has taken leave of His senses. What prompts this? Mark tells us in 3:21 that the family heard something that led them to this (erroneous) conclusion. What did they hear? Some translations render the phrase in such a way that it might seem that what the family heard was that Jesus couldn’t get time for a bite to eat (3:20). But all Mark really tells us is that the family “heard” (not actually “heard it” (ESV; “heard about this,” NIV, NKJV; “heard of this,” NASB). We have to look into

the context of the Gospel to try and discern what they heard that gave rise to the concerns. It doesn’t seem (to this author) that the mere fact that Jesus was finding it hard to get time to eat would be quite enough to raise the specter of Jesus having lost His senses. But there is something in the immediate context that could well have raised such concerns.

Jesus appointed twelve (3:12-19). Twelve was the number of the nation of Israel. It was the number that was associated with the sons of Jacob, the families of Israel, the dividing of the land. For Jesus to appoint twelve (as opposed to six or fourteen or three) would have been understood as much more than a random number. It was powerfully suggestive. And that may have been enough to fuel the family’s concerns.

The religious leaders are troubled by the evidence that Jesus has authority over unclean spirits. But Jesus doesn’t seem to play by the same rules that the rest of the religious leaders of the nation want to play by. He sees things differently, even though He exercises powers that none of them seem to be able to tap into to.

For both the family and the religious leaders, what Jesus is doing pushes the envelope. They don’t know how to fit Him and His actions into the way that they think life should go. For the family, this “average guy we grew up with” now seems to have nationalistic-tinged plans. How can He?! For the religious leaders, this non-traditional maverick is putting them to shame in the gracious way people are being set free through His ministry. How can He?!

Both groups have to come up with a way to explain—or, perhaps better, to explain away—Jesus. Seeing as Jesus doesn’t fit with the way they think life and ministry and religion should go, they have to find some way to move Jesus out of the picture. For the family, the solution is to suggest He has taken leave of His senses. For the religious leaders, the solution is to charge Him with being under demonic influence. Both solutions effectively do the same thing; they allow the groups to dismiss Jesus. And that is the thing we need to note.

As you discuss this passage, be attentive to the way we all, at times, try and dismiss Jesus. When we think that because we have spent so much time with Jesus over the years that we are in the place of being able to assess whether what He does “makes sense” or not, we are in danger of dismissing Him. When we think that our grasp of religious truths and our understanding of the Scriptures leaves us well situated to evaluate what and why Jesus does what He does, we are in danger of dismissing Him.

There is not simple answer to what will help us safeguard against these tendencies in our own lives with Jesus. Feel free to open up the discussion to a variety of options that will help us: 1) privilege what Jesus says about Himself over what we think about Him; 2) esteem what Jesus does even if it’s not what we would do or how we would do it; and 3) be willing to refrain from passing judgement on the rightness of what Jesus says and does and join the great crowd that seems content to “follow Him” (3:7).