



Mark This Year

**Daily devotional journey
through the Gospel of Mark**

Mark – Chapter 3

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Introduction

We like to think that we “get it,” That we know it all because we’ve been around it all our lives. We assume so much because we’ve seen entertainment and documentaries about the life of Jesus all our lives. From every possible vantage point, from every point of view, Jesus has been written about, talked about, documented up one side and down the other.

But when you take a look at the life of Jesus for yourself, you’ll be surprised at all the twists and turns it takes. You’ll also be so surprised at all the things that you “thought” you knew are not exactly true.

Take me for instance. I’ve been reading, learning, and even teaching about Jesus since the summer of 1970. You do the math. And even now, I’m learning new things about the Jesus himself, the people around him, and the stories that I thought I knew so well.

So, enjoy the journey. Let Jesus mark this year.

Mark 3

Stand Up

Another time Jesus went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. 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. Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, "Stand up in front of everyone."

Mark 3:1-3¹

I don't know about you, but if there were some people looking for a reason to accuse me of something, I think I'd go somewhere else. And they weren't all that particular of what they wanted to accuse me of. Anything would do. They weren't just casually looking at me, but really watching carefully and closely. And I'd certainly change up my routine. Going to the synagogue, where I always go on Saturday, would be a dead giveaway.

Maybe they were following Jesus. Maybe they blasted a message to all their friends and family to be on the lookout for Jesus. And once they found Jesus, they were like watchdogs, looking for anything, everything that they could use against him.

And what was their focus at this particular Synagogue, on this particular Saturday? A guy. But not just any guy, a guy with a shriveled hand. When Luke tells the story², he mentions that it's the right hand. There wasn't anything remarkable about this guy. He wasn't famous, he wasn't rich, he wasn't special. But what made him worth watching was his handicap, his withered hand.

He wasn't born this way, something happened. Maybe it was from an accident. Maybe it was from a disease. Maybe it happened a long time ago. Maybe it was recent. No matter the details, people stared. They stared because he was different. They stared because they wondered what he did to deserve this punishment from God.

They were looking to jump all over Jesus. And for what? If he spoke against Rome? The Jewish leaders? Said anything questionable about God? The spiritual and political leaders did more than just take a passing glance at Jesus, they continually kept on watching him, looking for any possible faults.

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² [Luke 6:6-11](#)

The thing that was foremost in their minds was seeing how Jesus lived, acted, and spoke during the Sabbath. These watchdogs were looking for a way to discredit Jesus personally.

They were watching Jesus like a hawk, to see if he healed. Imagine that; healing is a good thing. Heck, it's a great thing. But they were watching to see what Jesus did and said on a Saturday, on the Sabbath.

And there is no mystery about what they were expecting. They hoped, expected that he would heal this poor, wretched guy. They could care less about the man and his arm; they were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus.

And Jesus reaction is classic! Rather than hiding in the desert, or moving away from everyone, he's in a public place at a time when people would be gathering. He then publicly asked the man with the shriveled hand to stand up. Not in the corner, but up front so they have a 360° view of the man as he currently was.

And he does it. This poor man comes forward and stands in front of this hostile crowd. Shriveled hand and all.

We don't know what he was thinking. While we're not told what was going through the head and heart of the man with the shriveled hand, his mind had to be racing. Was he so desperate that he's willing to do anything? Was he so impressed with Jesus that he'll do whatever he said? Was he so scared that he didn't think, he just did it?

No matter the reason, no matter his emotions, no matter his thinking, he did it. He came forward. He walked through the people in the Synagogue and came to the front. After all, what did he have to lose? What could they say that he hasn't already heard? His arm couldn't get any worse, so why not.

Which brings up the question; are we willing to stand up in front of people when Jesus asks? Are we ready to respond to his call, walking through a crowd that's not full of friendly faces? Are we ready to expose your greatest weakness in public?

Are we ready and willing to do all this? When there are no guarantees? Jesus didn't say "Come up here and I'll heal your shriveled arm." There was no up-front conversation or agreement, "Jesus, if I come up front, you're going to heal me. Right?"

It was: hear Jesus, get up, walk. Period. We want all the details nailed down ahead of time. We want to know what to expect. But that's not the way it

works with Jesus. He's God, and we're not. So, he calls the shots. He leads. He gives the orders. Our role, our job is to obey.

Are you ready to stand up and say, "Yes sir" to Jesus?

Guilty as Charged

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. 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. Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.

Mark 3:4-6

When it comes to hating confrontation, I'm guilty as charged. I'm not sure anyone really likes it. Some people seem to thrive on it, but not me. I've had my lifetime supply of confrontation, yelling, screaming, and tension filled silence. Thank you very much. My homelife was not quiet, but loud. Noisy, aggressive, accusing, shaming. For the people that know me, this explains a lot.

Remember the last time you were in an uncomfortable situation? The silence and tension were so thick you could cut it with a knife. Everyone is uneasy, looking down or away from everyone else. They fold their arms, put their hands in their pockets, shuffle their feet. No one is talking. And then someone finally breaks the silence. It's like the sound of a mirror crashing to the floor, shattering into a million pieces.

When Jesus breaks the silence, he's clearly angry. There are three kinds of anger – which one best describes his anger?

- Sudden outburst of anger that cools off quickly.
- Sense of exasperation.
- Settled anger coming from the wrong that's been witnessed

Jesus didn't blow up. He didn't lose his cool. Jesus shows his "settled" anger here because his heart was saddened by their hardness of heart.

Their hearts were like being thickly covered with a callus, making them dull, unable to feel. They couldn't feel compassion or anything else for this guy with a shriveled hand. You don't get a hard heart overnight. It comes from ignoring the suffering of people for a long time. But it's more than being passive, it's also actively and intentionally doing things to harm people over time.

Rather than smack them, Jesus asks an insightful question. Should you do good or evil? He moves them beyond theory and into daily living. There are only two choices: to save a life or destroy, to heal or to kill.

And when you come down to it, those two options apply to all of life. Are the words I'm about to say good or evil? Will they build up or tear down? Will they save or destroy.

Jesus asks a question and does what every good question requires. Silence. He's quiet and he waits. And waits. And waits. As they are silent, Jesus looks around the room. I'm sure that his stare cut into them, embarrassing them, but it didn't change their heart.

Turning from his anger and disappointment at these spiritual leaders and giants, he looks at the guy. The guy who's only qualification is that his hand is shriveled. No training, no advanced degrees, no ministry website. Only a need that can't be hidden

Jesus gives a command to the guy to stretch out his withered hand. Not someone else's hand, or somebody else's problem. His problem. His hand. In obedience, the guy is forced to expose what he normally might try to hide because of shame.

Low and behold - it's healed! And instead of praising God, thanking Jesus, or celebrating with the healed guy, what do the Pharisees do? They storm out of the Synagogue and start planning how to kill Jesus.

There are times in our lives when Jesus wants us to extend our "withered hand" for his healing. Sometimes we have to expose our weakness, our frailty, the thing that we want to hide so desperately. And yet, holding out our "withered hand" can be the first step towards healing.

What is the "withered hand" that Jesus wants you to stretch out before him? What is the "withered hand" that you've been hiding for so long? Could it be that Jesus wants to use your "withered hand" in a significant way? As odd as it may sound, your "withered hand" may be the key for the rest of your life, and the life of those around you.

Stretching out our "withered hand" takes faith. It is not some form of showing off, but plain and simple obedience. Period. We should choose to obey God's calling and direction in our life because of who he is. Not out of guilt, but in loving response to what he's done.

Our "withered hand" might just be the thing that transforms. Transforms more than our "withered hand" but our entire outlook of life. And not just our life, but the lives of those around us.

Are you willing to say, "Guilty as charged" and stretch out the withered part of your life?

Attract a Crowd

Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the sea, and a great crowd followed, from Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem and Idumea and from beyond the Jordan and from around Tyre and Sidon. When the great crowd heard all that he was doing, they came to him. And he told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, lest they crush him, for he had healed many, so that all who had diseases pressed around him to touch him. And whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, "You are the Son of God." And he strictly ordered them not to make him known.

Mark 3:7-12

For some, this next statement is going to make them uncomfortable. It's going to go against the grain of what they've been told, what they feel. And it certainly doesn't sound spiritual.

Jesus attracted a crowd.

Yes, he did. He was so emotionally and relationally attractive that people naturally wanted to be with him. His words and teaching were amazing, astounding, and exciting. He was altogether different than the normal, garden variety, speakers, and teachers of the law³.

The great crowds Jesus' attracted were not the result of everyone reading their social media feeds and then running right over, creating a backup on the Interstate through Israel. No, it happened over time. One person heard who then shared with another, who then shared with another. It certainly was a grassroots movement.

There was no proclamation or declaration from political or spiritual leaders. As a matter of fact, the leaders were unanimously against Jesus. There was no mas media, or even handouts. The crowds happened as one person heard and was moved by what Jesus did and said.

Their attraction was more about what he did, how he lived, how he helped. People "heard all that he was doing, and they came to him." They were continually hearing of the many things he was doing. Over and over, the stories were told and retold until they just had to get up and see for themselves.

³ Matthew 7:28,29

They responded to Jesus, not because of a single incident, but the ongoing, cumulative impact. They did not hear it once but over and over and over. The life of Jesus, and what he did, was the topic of conversation and excitement to such an extent that they could not get enough of him. More and more stories were repeated, over and over. More and more information and reaction to Jesus just kept coming.

The ministry of Jesus was not the “nuclear option” of public relations. It was the result of daily public interaction with people. There was no newsletter. There were no publications. There were no billboards. There was no texting.

Public relations were both “public” and “relations” with people. People are at the center of it all, and people must be at the center of what we do and say. And we need to start with the people who are right in front of us.

This “grassroots” approach to serving God and telling people about him must be the foundation for not only what we do but why we do it. It is to be all about Jesus, all of the time. And all about people, all the time. Everything else must take a distant back seat, lower priority.

What are people hearing about you and me? It isn’t necessarily what we said or did. We can only control what we do and say, we cannot control how that gets distributed or distorted. We can only live the truth and speak the truth one day at a time, one person at a time.

And you never know where that one encounter, that one’s word is going to lead.

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

Romans 10:14,15

We were walking out of church recently, not looking to attract a crowd, and we met a couple that we did know. Within a few moments, the husband shared how he was scheduled for colon cancer surgery in a few days. They were both new to the area and now they were going to be further “isolated” through an extended hospital stay. And to make matters even more difficult, the hospital was more than an hour away.

With their permission, we met with Jesus right there in the parking lot for prayer. The funny thing is that this happened on "Missions Sunday" where the focus was on "going" and foreign missions. Now in one sense, this was "foreign missions" because the people were totally foreign and unknown to us.

So, we did attract a crowd, just by reaching out and showing interest in people. Believe you me, if I can do it, so can you.

Wanted

Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons. These are the twelve he appointed: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter), James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means "sons of thunder"), Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

Mark 3:13-19

We don't like this kind of thinking. We want it to be "those who were worthy." Or "those who earned it." "Those who came in first." It should be a level playing field, no one should have an advantage. You only get what you earn, what you work hard for. After all, we don't like it when people play favorites. Especially when they don't choose us or choose in our favor.

Why do you think they spend millions of dollars each and every year on instant replay during football games? They want each and every decision to be right, to be accurate, to be fair. Both the college and professional football have lots of cameras and technology so they can see exactly what's going on. They even have cameras with batteries and an antenna in the pylons and first-down markers.

These guys were chosen by Jesus, for Jesus. They were picked not because they ran faster or jumped higher. They weren't picked because of test scores, IQ tests. They weren't picked because they raised their hands higher and straighter. They weren't picked because they went ooh-oooh to get Jesus' attention. He picked them for himself.

And after he picked them, they went to him. I know it sounds obvious, but they had to respond. They broke away from the crowd and joined up with Jesus. Jesus called, and they came.

Only after coming did Jesus appoint them. And what did he appoint them to? To be with him. The first order of business is to be with Jesus. You can download all the bible apps you want, join all the church's you can, attend all the small group and weekly meetings possible, but that's not the primary thing.

The single most important thing is to be with Jesus. Nothing happens without being with Jesus.

You see, we've got it backwards. We want the preaching, the authority, the driving out demons. We want the existing stuff first. We crave the thrill, being in front of people, being part of the show.

But Jesus view of the best way to live is 180 degrees from ours. His world is right-side up while ours is upside-down. His way of living looks toward who God is and his everlasting love for us. He wants nothing but the best for you and me. And that best starts with being with Jesus.

God is not shy about calling people to himself. He's calling people all the time. And when he called these twelve guys, he knew precisely who he was calling. He understood exactly what he was getting. And what he was going to experience in and through them.

- Disappointment
- Failure
- Betrayal
- Faithlessness
- Abandonment

And as God is calling you and me, he also knows who and what he's getting with us.

Sometimes in my pride I think, "Hey there God, you got a great deal when you got me. After all, I'm better than most. I'm not like crowd. I'm above them. I'm better than them."

And then something happens; I do something, say something, think something that just shows what a totally wretched person I am. I can do nothing but scream in anguish and cry for help.

What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Romans 7:24,25

The Apostle Paul, spiritual giant that he was, comes to the same point in his life. He sees that there is no way that he can save himself, help himself. So, he throws himself at the feet of God who gives deliverance through Jesus.

I guess I'm in good company, and so are you. So, we should do the same thing, throw ourselves onto God's great mercy and forgiveness that's found only in Jesus.

Crowded

Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind."

Mark 3:20,21

Crowds can be terrifying. Whether in a subway or at a sold-out stadium, or a packed theater, people are pressing in on you from all sides. No one says, "Excuse me." You get pushed along and there's nothing you can do to fight it. If you try to stop and go against the flow, you'll get knocked down and trampled. You're out of control.

My most frightening example came after attending opening day at Yankee Stadium. They were playing the hated Boston Red Sox. There had been several yelling matches and even a brawl where an entire section of the upper deck erupted into a massive fight.

After the game, people were desperately trying to get out and go home. To say the least, there was tension in the air. As fans from both sides started yelling and pushing, I had no choice but to go where everyone around me went. First one way, then another.

Eventually I saw an exit sign and tried to make my way towards it. At first, I was pushed beyond it, but the crowd pushed me back and I was just able to slip out of the mass of humanity and out. It was just so scary.

Here we have Jesus and his disciples in a house, and it's crowded. I don't know how crowded it was in that house, but it must have been really crowded. They couldn't even eat. Now, that's some kind of crowded!

Somehow, his family hears about what's going on and tries to step in. I hope their motives were good, wanting to look after Jesus and protect him. But it's hard to guess what's in people's heads.

But their clear goal was to take Jesus out of there, even if it had to be done by force. Their intention was to take him, grabbing him against his will, if necessary.

It may be odd to thing to think or say, but then it's me. Here we have two very different groups of people trying to do the exact same thing. They may

be using two wildly different strategies, two very different tactics, but with the same goal. To control Jesus.

Think about it.

- First, we have the crowd of people in the house. They have pushed themselves in so tightly that Jesus is stuck. They have achieved their goal; they are controlling Jesus. It's so crowded that it's impossible for him to leave or eat.
- Second, we have his family who are going to try and push themselves in on Jesus. Their goal is to take control of their family member, forcing him to come with them. They may not be in control at this moment, but they clearly have a goal to get in control of Jesus.

This is exactly where we find people. One group thinks they have control of Jesus. These are leaders of organizations that claim to represent him and his best interests. They are crowding around Jesus so tightly that it's almost impossible for a normal, average person to get close.

And then we have the people who want to have control of Jesus. They see the abuse of power and how the common people can't get near Jesus. But their goal is just to replace the current power structure with another power structure.

But Jesus is not going to be controlled by either group. Or any group for that matter. Jesus is not going to be put into a box. Jesus is God and he defines himself. Period. No group, no political party, no one gets to define or control God. Only he does that.

When Moses spoke to the burning bush, remember how God described himself.

I am who I am.

Exodus 3:14

God is who he is and doesn't need any help. He doesn't need any controlling. He doesn't need us to define him. He doesn't need our love. His life was full and complete from eternity past. And yet, he made us for himself. He made us so that he could love us.

So, when we feel the crowds of life pushing in on us, Jesus is the one who is always available to comfort, console, care for us. The words of the old hymn say it so, so well.

Can we find a friend so faithful Who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness, Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Do thy friends despise, forsake thee? Take it to the Lord in prayer;
In His arms He'll take and shield thee, Thou wilt find a solace there.⁴

⁴ What a Friend We Have in Jesus, Joseph M. Scriven, 1855

Attacked

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."

Mark 3:22

The new person or thing always gets attacked. At first, everyone wants to learn about it. It used to be cell phones, then the internet. As I write these words, the new things are electric vehicles, EV's, cryptocurrencies, NFT's, and the metauniverse. Tomorrow, who knows what it's going to be. And whenever someone or something new comes along, the world quickly gets split into those who think it's a good idea and those who attack it and want nothing more than to crush it like a bug.

I recently posted something about my Tesla on social media. I was really surprised about how many people were so outraged and negative about EV's. Not to be too sensitive, they accused me of everything from destroying the planet to be a Communist sympathizer. Something similar happened to Jesus.

Jesus had stirred up the spiritual landscape. He came out of nowhere, from a place that had a really, really, bad reputation. He had none of the normal qualifications; he didn't have diplomas from any of the local or national schools, he wasn't recognized by any of the big names of his day. He didn't even have any financial backing.

And yet, this Jesus was attracting lots of attention and crowds. People were willing to drop everything just so they could hear him⁵, see him⁶, touch the hem of his cloths⁷. No one had attracted this kind of attention before, so the leaders of the day wanted to find out who this guy was and what he was doing in order to attack and destroy him.

They didn't go after what he said, or even what he did. Because they didn't understand him, couldn't use or control him, they tried to smear him, his name, and his reputation through association. They said that Jesus could not be trusted or believed because of who his secret friends and coworkers were, his leader behind the scenes.

⁵ Luke 5:15

⁶ John 12:21

⁷ Mark 5:29

But it's worse. They spread the unbelievable dirty and hateful accusation of being part of Satan's plan and army. They started and grew the rumor that he was demon possessed and was being used by the prince of demons.

Without saying another word, they were able to label Jesus not just as being evil, but their rumor would totally destroy his claims about being the God's anointed and special messenger, the son of God, and God the son.

Now, that's being attacked. Do you remember the last time you were attacked? How did it make you feel?

Thinking back on the times that I've been attacked, they were all different, all unique, had different twists and turns. But there was one common thing about how they made me feel.

Alone. No one else was going through what I was going through. No one else could understand. And because no one could help, I was out there all alone against this seen and unseen enemy.

And when I felt this way, the enemy had won. By myself there was no way that I could stand against the flood of attacks and overwhelming fear that was about to drown me and my emotions.

But that's not how we're supposed to respond, that's not the right road to recovery and restoration. As a matter of fact, it's just the opposite of how we're made.

We need to immediately turn to God with a cry for help and strength. No matter who it is or what it is, it's going to be bigger, stronger, faster, smarter than we are. They are like a giant wave that's crashing over our heads, burying us under tons of water.

The only thing to do, our only hope, is to turn to God.

But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one.

2 Thessalonians 3:3

God was faithful to Jesus, he has been faithful to us in times past, and will be faithful today, and tomorrow. Actually, turning to God is the only reasonable, logical thing to do. He has all the power, knowledge, and smarts to defeat our enemies. We are way too weak. We don't see the whole picture.

But God does. And he's ready to save. He's mighty to save. He's willing to save. All he's waiting for is the invitation to save.

Starting today, when attacked, let's start to immediately ask him to save and protect us. And you know what? That's one prayer he's always ready to hear and respond to.

If – Then

So Jesus called them over to him and began to speak to them in parables: "How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come.

Mark 3:23-26

It always happens this way – something happens and then it leads to something else. And then something else happens which leads to something else again. And so it goes on and on. I call it an "If – Then."

Have you ever seen a [Domino Shows](#)⁸? It's where they push over one domino and that leads to all these other dominos falling? That's certainly an example of a "If – Then." It's not only how dominos work, but also how life is lived, It's also how attacks work.

I remember one attack very well. It still makes my stomach churn. Someone had falsely accused me of stealing from the company. They wrote a long and vicious email to the company owner. Thinking I had to defend myself and my reputation, I blasted a long email to the company owner, destroying each and every accusation. It made me feel better for about five minutes but didn't really help.

But when Jesus responds to an If, he really knows how to deliver the Then. You'll notice that he doesn't go after each and every little detail, correcting all the individual things that were wrong with the attack. Instead, he does three things that we should follow when attacked.

1. **Step Back** – he doesn't get bogged down in all the minor details but tries to refocus the conversation and attack.
2. **Ask Questions** – rather than go through a list of things, he honors the people listening by looking to them to figure it out for themselves.
3. **Don't Directly Answer** – it's so easy to just blast people with our opinions, what's true. But it rarely helps those listening.

Someone once said that we really don't need to be told that we're wrong, we need to be shown. After all, our mother, our boss, our mate, our pastors, have all been telling us that we're wrong all our lives. And how much have

⁸ <https://youtu.be/lo6x4eulY9g>

we changed? I'd like to suggest that there has been precious little change in our lives through telling us all the wrongs we've done, how wrong we are.

Instead, we need to be shown. We are shown when we face our words, thoughts, actions, and attitudes directly for ourselves. This is exactly what Jesus does, he asks a question that they have to answer for themselves. Instead of telling them that they are dummies or sinners, he turns the question back to them to figure out, so they can see it for themselves, so they can be shown.

Getting a report card, annual performance evaluation, or getting told that we've screwed up is not going to move the needle for the way we live our life. As a matter of fact, if the history of my life is any help, I always, always, always dig my heels in deeper whenever someone tells me that I'm wrong.

It always raises what little hair I still have on the back of my neck and lifts my stubbornness to new heights. It's like drinking a large bottle of Stubborn-ade It renews and reinvigorates my commitment, strength, and resolve not to change one little bit. And oh, not to mention, so I can prove them wrong and watch them eat their words.

But Jesus doesn't treat them that way. And he doesn't treat us that way either.

Don't you realize how patient he is being with you? Or don't you care? Can't you see that he has been waiting all this time without punishing you, to give you time to turn from your sin? His kindness is meant to lead you to repentance.

Romans 2:4 TLB

Think about how patient God has been with you. With me. Did he jump down from heaven and stomp us at the first misstep? Did he just throw us to the wolves when we accidentally, or purposefully, walked away from him?

The very short answer is no. He didn't. He's always patient. Always kind. Always good. Always looking for us to turn back to him. And when we repent, turn back to him, he always receives.

So, what's going to be our response to God's If – Then? If he's patient and kind, or should I say when he's patient and kind, what's our "Then" going to look like? Will we respond in repentance? Will our next step to be to fall down and say, "Be merciful to me, a sinner?"

That's the "If – Then" that Jesus is looking for. Longing for. He's already done the "If". The "Then" is now up to us.

Plunder

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.

Mark 3:27

I don't know about you, but the word plunder sounds kind of old fashion to me. It makes me think of Pirates of the Caribbean and how they steal from the unsuspecting, the rich, from one another.

Plundering is different than stealing. Stealing is where thieves take only selected things. Plundering is more random, grabbing anything that's available.

A modern-day example of plundering would be the outbreak of "**Smash and Grab**"⁹ incidents that's hit all kind of stores nationwide. Gangs, using social media and texting, organize themselves, and all show up at the same time. They aren't gangs in the traditional sense of the word. These digital gangs form just for a single hit, and then go their separate ways.

Armed with weapons and heavy tools, they arrive at the stores at the same time, coming from all different directions. They go in, breaking windows and displays, grabbing whatever they can, running away with thousands in merchandise.

Another example of 21st century plundering are all the scams and schemes used to steal from credit cards and bank accounts. According to the FBI's latest report, there were 791,790 complaints of suspected internet crime totaling more than \$4.2 billion in 2020¹⁰.

Jesus gives some very good advice about preventing plundering of our lives.

- **Go Outside** – it may seem strange, but Jesus says that you first get the strong man to go outside. They leave the safety and security of the house for some reason. When threatened, we need to actively take steps to stay inside.
- **Strength is Not Everything** – don't overestimate you own strength to resist, and don't underestimate their power or determination to break in.

⁹ <https://youtu.be/47oTbsLEG-o>

¹⁰ https://www.ic3.gov/Media/PDF/AnnualReport/2020_IC3Report.pdf

- ***Tie Up*** – going outside is only the first step. The strong must be neutralized so they cannot fight back. Once tied up, the future is open.
- ***Once Inside*** – the big idea is to get inside. And once inside, everything they own and hold dear is available to be taken.
- ***No Such Thing as Totally Safe*** – No matter how strong, how well prepared, anyone can fall to thieves. We must be humbly prepared, knowing that we can't do it all on our own.

Once your house has been broken into, life seems like it's never the same. You put lots and lots of locks on doors and windows. Metal security bars are installed over windows and doors. You check, recheck, and recheck again the locks to your house when leaving. You're always looking over your shoulder. You never can truly relax in new places, in new circumstances.

We have some very dear friends whose bank accounts were plundered by internet thieves, taking every last dollar they had. To say that it has wreaked havoc on their lives is a great understatement. And even though I already had strong passwords and other digital protections in place, I went through and created really, really strong passwords for everything in addition to adding some other high-end technical protections.

If I had to guess, I'd bet that you use locks on all your doors and windows in your house or apartment. Locking only some of them really doesn't help. When you lock the doors on your car, they all lock together. For any locks to work, they all have to be used.

And just like our physical lives and houses, our spiritual lives and houses need to be strong and protected. How much time, energy, and money do you put into being a strong person when it comes to what you believe? Do you at least ask a question about ideas and beliefs that come into our lives over the radio? Television? Phones?

I am totally blown away at how so many people are getting their "information" about God, truth, what's right or wrong, from anyone and from anywhere. Just because someone wins a sporting event, has a best-selling song, book, or movie, or has a large internet following, instantly becomes a trusted source for all spiritual truth and insight.

You wouldn't trust just anyone to operate on your loved one. You wouldn't trust just anyone with protecting and investing your life's savings. You wouldn't trust just anyone to look after your children.

So, be careful, be diligent, be watchful when it comes to who you listen to. What you listen to. If you don't, you might just wind up getting tied up, and having your house plundered.

Bet the Farm

Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin.” He said this because they were saying, “He has an impure spirit.”

Mark 3:28-30

Sports betting seems to have almost come out of nowhere. What was once reserved for dark, smoke-filled backrooms of bars, or restricted to Las Vegas casinos, is now everywhere. Every sport, and I mean every sport not only recognizes betting, but they even advertise on televised broadcasts.

With the touch of a button your phone, you can place a bet on just about anything, anywhere. From betting on actual games to fantasy leagues, from football, boxing, European football, the Super Bowl, the Olympics, horseracing. You can bet on college games the same way you wager on professional sports.

Is it any wonder that state governments are licking their chops over sports betting? New Jersey alone collected over \$100 million in tax revenue in 2021¹¹.

While Jesus never directly talked about sports betting, he did talk about things that were absolutely certain. Things that you could count on, things that were a sure bet. Things that you could depend on, things that you could bet your life on.

That’s exactly what Jesus says about people being forgiven. It’s an absolute truth, it’s a sure thing that we can be forgiven for everything and anything. But Jesus adds something that cannot be forgiven, blaspheming against the Holy Spirit. And how does Jesus define this sin? It’s when you continually go on and on about Jesus being filled and controlled by an impure spirit.

This is not just saying the words, or even thinking them in your head. This is when you’ve come to the conclusion that Jesus is really a representative of all that is evil, and that he’s controlled by dark spirits. You may have looked at the evidence or not, but you’ve come to the decision that Jesus is in league with, in partnership with Satan.

¹¹ <https://www.legalsportsreport.com/sports-betting/revenue/>

If you come to the end of your life and are still convinced that Jesus is filled by a demon, then your eternal destiny is sealed. But until that moment, there is time for repentance.

There were two thieves crucified next to Jesus. They were probably guilty of trying to overthrow the Romans, along with Barabbas. And after they were crucified, they joined in with the crowd and mocked Jesus¹².

But sometime later, while still hanging on the cross, one of the thieves had a change of heart. One thief was still spewing anger and bitterness at Jesus while the other says words that point to where his inner soul is moved.

"We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

Luke 23:41,42

If it was me, I'd probably tell him that he was right. He was being punished because of what he did. He deserved it and should hang there for a long time, dying a slow and painful death. But not Jesus.

Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

Luke 23:43

They had broken both man's laws and God's laws. There was no doubt about their guilt. The evidence was overwhelming. And yet, when this one guy came to the end of himself, he turned to Jesus.

I don't know where you find yourself. How close or far you've come or strayed from God. If you find yourself at the end of your spiritual, emotional, or even physical rope, then it's time to turn to Jesus.

There is no better time than right now. Turn to Jesus. Turn to him to be at peace with God. Turn to him to be in paradise with him. And that change starts today.

It doesn't take any great words or sacrifice on our part. We don't have to stand up in front of a crowd and make a speech, get baptized, or anything else. It's a turning towards Jesus, and it happens right where we are.

¹² Matthew 27:44

Turn your eyes upon Jesus, Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace¹³.

¹³ Turn Your Eyes upon Jesus, Helen Howarth Lemme, 1922

Family Intervened

Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you."

Mark 3:31,32

There have been times when I thought to myself, "What's wrong with them?" But I know for certain that there were more times when other people asked "The Question" about me! What's wrong with Chet?"

While there had been many minor rashes of "The Question," the first major outbreak happened in 1978 when I decided to leave the safety of family, friends, and our hometown of Baltimore, MD and move 90 minutes north to Wilmington, DE. I was the first, and remain the only person in our immediate families that left the Baltimore area.

Yes, I was questioned over and over about the move. I must have heard "What's wrong with you?" and all its variations over a hundred times. What's wrong with Baltimore? What's wrong with your job? What's wrong with your church? What's wrong with us that you would want to move away?

But the biggest problem wasn't about me. While the somewhat more important hurdle was the question about Mary Ann moving, the Mount Everest of all barriers and questions was our daughter. She was the only granddaughter on my side of the family and the first grandchild on my wife's family.

I could have left, no problem. Sometimes I thought that was the prevailing sentiment. But taking little Jenny Ann, that was the mother of all stumbling blocks to the family. I got many different intervention approaches: the cold shoulder, the icy stare, the single-syllable answers, the indifferent responses to my questions. Mostly what I got was the indirect approach.

But Jesus family went in the totally different direction. There was nothing indirect about what they did. They took the absolutely direct approach. And why?

When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind."

Mark 3:21

They weren't going to just talk with him. Make suggestions to him. No, they were going to grab him by the arm, or whatever else they needed to grab and pull him out of there. Their plan was to take Jesus by force and, if necessary, against his will.

This was their intervention plan.

Funny thing though, Jesus was never forced to do anything. Even in this situation, Jesus does what he wants to do, what he needs to do. Jesus was never forced to do something he didn't want to. Think about his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, the mob comes armed to the teeth, expecting trouble.

And what happens when they come? He doesn't hide or try and get out of it. He points to himself as the guy they are looking to arrest. He identifies who he is. He steps up to the plate. And what's their reaction? They step back and fall to the ground¹⁴. He then again asks who they are looking for and points to himself. He also tells the mob to let everyone else go free.

Yes, Jesus was seized and arrested¹⁵, but he was in control. He was arrested because that's what he wanted, that's what God required. He willingly gave himself up for us.

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."

John 10:11

Jesus was willing to walk into the time and place where he was going to be sacrificed for us. His life was not taken, it was freely given as the once-and-for-all sacrifice for all sin. Past, present, and future sin was all taken care of by Jesus on the cross.

As we look back, we need to ask ourselves what we did to deserve so great a sacrifice? What did we do to earn his loving payment? And the answer is absolutely nothing. He did it all out of his love for us. A love that wants nothing but the absolute best for us. A love where he does all the paying and dying while we get all the forgiveness, restoration, and blessing.

His family tried to intervene, and they failed. Jesus intervened for us, and he succeeded. Both now and for all eternity.

¹⁴ John 18:6

¹⁵ Luke 22:54

Family Identified

"Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked.

Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."

Mark 3:33-35

Who's closer than you mom and dad? Your brothers, your sisters? Your aunts and uncles, your cousins? They are the people who were all around you from the beginning. They are the greatest influences on who you've become.

My mom was the rock and workhorse of our family. She worked in the house while my dad worked outside. She did all the washing, cleaning, shopping, cooking, organizing. And when we went fishing, she took our catch and cleaned them, scaled them, cutting off their heads, gutted them. She made vats of homemade spaghetti sauce and crab soup.

My dad went to work each and every day, no matter what. Sometimes he got called in the middle of the night to free someone who got stuck in a hospital elevator. He added two bedrooms upstairs and finished the basement, including a bathroom. He did carpentry, electrical, concrete, masonry, plumbing, appliance repair, and auto mechanic work to name a few.

My brother was seven years older and much, much taller and stronger than me. When we joined the neighborhood pool, someone asked if he'd like to join the swim team. He jumped in the pool and started setting all county speed records. This led to his scholarship to a local, private college.

While we had all the pieces of the Cleaver family, mother, father, and two boys, we weren't anything like the show. They were quiet, calm, people who spoke with patience and listened to each other. We were at the total opposite side of the family universe.

We were loud, we yelled and screamed at each other. Nobody listened to each other, we were always talking over one another. It was a constant contest to be noticed by someone, anyone.

No matter what, families are together. Families get together. Each Christmas and Easter we gathered with my mom's family for homemade spaghetti and

ravioli. After that, we gathered with my dad's family for Polish ham, turkey, kapusta (Polish sauerkraut), Kielbasa (Polish sausage), and Krusciki (Polish Bowties.)

No matter what happened, no matter what they said, no matter what they did, we were family. We were committed by birth, by blood to one another, to our family. There wasn't anything that we wouldn't do for our family.

When it came time to put in our driveway, all the uncles showed up and pushed wheelbarrow after wheelbarrow of wet concrete up the hill and dumped it into the concrete forms. Afterwards, they all pitched in to spread it around, level it, and then troweling it smooth.

When Jesus identifies his family, this is the kind of commitment he's talking about. His brother, his sister, and his mother are the ones who do God's will. They don't talk about it, they don't write about it, they don't debate it, they don't post about it. They do it. Period.

Which brings up the question, how much family evidence is there for our relationship with Jesus? Are we sitting around at the feet of Jesus, getting to know him more and more? And does that then translate and motivate us to do God's will for our lives?

And this family evidence doesn't just happen at Christmas and Easter but is a constant focus and ongoing activity. It's at the center of who we are. What we do. Who we serve. Who we hang around with.

We do not enter into God's family because of what we do, what we know, or where we've been. Becoming family is only because of who Jesus is and what he did. We are born into his family, and then there is family evidence that is available for all to see.

The people that Jesus identified as his brother, sister, and mother had come to Jesus. They left what they were doing, where they were, and decided it was more important to be with Jesus than anything else. He was the priority. He was the reason to stop everything else. He was the reason for living. And when they got to Jesus, they stopped everything else and gave him their undivided attention

Is that how we live? Is Jesus the priority of our life? Is he our reason for living? Is he the one who energizes and prioritizes us in our daily life? And when we finally do get with Jesus, do we give him our undivided attention? Do we turn off our cell phones, quiet our minds and lives? When will we shut

up, sit at his feet, and listen carefully to each and every word? Do we take it in, or just let it slide by?