

Jesus: Misunderstood and Rejected

DAVE BAST

The Gospel of John opens with a majestic passage announcing the incarnation of the divine Word; but in the middle of John's prologue comes a statement that reminds us of a sad truth about Jesus' life. He came to his own and his own people did not receive him. In telling the story of Jesus, Mark's Gospel shows again and again how Jesus' own people misunderstood, and even rejected him. We will look at this theme today on *Groundwork*. Stay tuned.

SCOTT HOEZEE

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast; and Scott, now we have come to the second in our series on the Gospel of Mark; we are planning six programs in this series, which isn't a whole lot to do with the whole book of Mark, so what we have chosen to do is to feature certain ideas or themes that Mark brings forth as he tells the story of Jesus.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; Mark is a dramatic gospel. We said his favorite adverb is *immediately*—immediately—every other verse in Chapter 1 something happens *immediately*; and we said then, what is that about? Well, we thought maybe Mark was either trying to comfort a persecuted Church or wake up a lethargic, apathetic Church by reminding them of how powerful our savior is; and when he came to this earth he hit the ground running, and his ministry took off like a rocket; and so, that has great pastoral meaning for us yet today, as do the other themes, including the one we are looking at today, which is a rhythm in Mark's Gospel; it is almost as regular as a heartbeat in Mark, if you just scan through the gospel quickly you will see that this theme of rejection and misunderstanding comes up again and again and again; almost every time Jesus teaches something significant, it is followed by somebody totally missing the boat and misunderstanding...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

If not outright rejecting what he said.

DAVE BAST

Absolutely; and if you step back from that just a bit and reflect on it, what you come to realize is that Mark's primary question is the question of identity: Who is Jesus?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

No question could be more important than that. You need to come to know who he is and understand that. I remember years and years ago, I think maybe when I was a youngster, you used to sometimes hear people say: Well, if you are a new Christian, or if you are really kind of new to the New Testament, you should read the Gospel of John; and then someone else said: You know, that is the last thing maybe you should read, because John is extremely complicated...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And deep. You should read the Gospel of Mark for starters, because Mark is, as we said, fast paced, and it zeroes in on that key question: Just who is Jesus?

SCOTT HOEZEE

And as we will see in the next program, there is also a sense in Mark's Gospel that Jesus does conceal and keep secret his identity to a degree for reasons we will talk about in the next program; but in this program, we want to see how, despite everything he said and did, he is often misunderstood; and we get to it right away in a very startling passage, just a couple of verses here from Mark Chapter 3, where we read:

^{19b}Then Jesus entered a house; ²⁰and again, a crowd gathered so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. ²¹When Jesus' family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind!"

DAVE BAST

Yes; so, Jesus is teaching in Galilee—his home area. It is in the north; if you know a little bit about the geography of the New Testament, most of Jesus' teaching and healing ministry took place up there, in his home district; and Jesus' family, in the time of his ministry—his public ministry—with the exception of his mother—basically did not accept his claims or his acts as the Messiah; and so, we read this comment that they thought he was crazy, and a little bit later we see something similar. So, picking it up again from that same Mark Chapter 3:

³¹Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. ³²A 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. ³⁴Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. ³⁵Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother." Jesus takes a kind of a distance toward his own family.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; if his family thought he was off his rocker in the first place, when he says *this* they must have further concluded that he had lost his mind: What do you mean, who are your mother and brother? We are right here. So, it is amazing that...and actually...it is actually kind of sad, but it is totally surprising that Jesus' own family couldn't understand what he was doing, and they wanted to take charge of him, it said in Mark 3. In other words, they wanted to take him home and lock him up...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Because this is an embarrassment. This is a family scandal and embarrassment. Better to put him away...you know, but again, you can understand it a little bit. He had probably been sort of a normal-seeming guy. He had been in the family business for a long time; and then all of a sudden one day he hangs up the carpentry apron and lights out on a preaching career, and he is casting out demons, and he seems to be making some pretty big claims for himself. I mean, C. S. Lewis once said: If we ran into somebody like this today, we

would conclude either everything he said is true, or he is as crazy as somebody who claims to be a poached egg.

DAVE BAST

Right,

SCOTT HOEZEE

And Jesus' family couldn't quite figure out how the boy they grew up with was doing and saying all these things; and so they thought he was disturbed.

DAVE BAST

Well, and exactly; that is just the reaction...not only his family, but his friends and neighbors from his old hometown had toward him, as we read again from Mark; this time from Chapter 6, where Jesus went to his hometown, that is Nazareth in Galilee, accompanied by his disciples.

²When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed.

"Where did this man get these things?" they asked. "Where is this wisdom that has been given him? What are these remarkable miracles he is performing? ³Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son; and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us? And they took offence at him.

So, you see that exact reaction. I mean, imagine your older brother suddenly started doing and saying the things Jesus did, or the kid down the block that you have known since he was running around in diapers with snot coming out of his nose...you would be likely to say exactly what these people said: Come on! Get off it! That is just Jesus.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and interesting too, that because his own townspeople didn't have faith in him, you know, we are told that he couldn't do many miracles there, which seems rather strange as well, that this rejection of Jesus is actually having an effect on his ministry. We will assume that it didn't mean Jesus didn't have the power to do miracles, but you know, if the miracles are what particularly the Gospel of John teaches, but really, all the gospels, they were signs of the kingdom...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And so, if people are not going to believe in the kingdom, then maybe there was no sense in performing arrows pointing to it; and in that sense, Jesus kind of self-limited, because what is the sense of performing miracles? They weren't sideshows...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

They weren't there to dazzle and entertain, they were there to point to a larger truth; and if they are rejecting that larger truth, that Jesus is bringing in God's kingdom, then why do them?

DAVE BAST

Yes; Mark does add: He couldn't do very many miracles there, except to heal a few sick people.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

You know, we should all be so unable to do these mighty acts. So, there is a mystery around here, and I think we should also observe, even though we won't really get into this, but later...eventually Jesus' family did come to believe in him, and his brother James actually became the leader of the church in Jerusalem. So, this was kind of a temporary blindness or rejection on their part, but it seems to be because they were overly familiar; and you just think about people today in our own culture; you know, you want to try to share with them the impact that Jesus can have, and they say: Well, come on! Christianity...I know all about that. This over familiarity that can breed contempt, as the saying goes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; so there was rejection of Jesus. There was misunderstanding from his own family; but this continues to happen in Mark. Coming up in just a moment we will look at an incident where the rejection of him gets much more serious. Stay tuned.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, where today, Scott, we are continuing our series on the Gospel of Mark, and we are looking at a couple of passages, so far from Mark 3 and one from Mark 6, that show how Jesus' own family—his relatives, his friends and neighbors from his hometown—just did not accept the fact that he could be the Messiah. Some thought he was crazy; others sort of dismissed him: Well, he's just a blue collar carpenter type, you know, who shouldn't be going around pretending he is a great preacher.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Also, though, in that same chapter...so, some of that was in Mark 3, where Jesus' family rejects him, and the like. Earlier in that chapter, we are told a story of a healing miracle, which hardly has the effect you might think a miracle would have. So, let's listen to this story:

¹Another time, Jesus went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. ²Some 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. ³Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, "Stand up in front of everyone," ⁴and then Jesus asked them, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil? To save life or to kill?" They remained silent. ⁵Jesus looked around at them in anger, and deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored. ⁶Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus. That's the thanks you get for healing a man.

DAVE BAST

And we are only in Mark 3.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

Already, they are kind of putting their heads together to figure out: How can we...not just reject this guy, but they want to kill him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

They want to get rid of him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And you know, I have long thought about this passage, Dave, that clearly they set Jesus up. Usually people with disabilities or sicknesses were not really allowed in the synagogue, and so forth; but here is this man with a shriveled hand. He is front and center, and everybody is watching. They planted this guy—they put him where they knew Jesus would see this man, because their thinking was: He won't be able to resist helping him, and then we will get him for breaking the Sabbath...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And of course, that is exactly what happened. So, he does this great miracle. Nobody says praise God! Oh, hallelujah for a miracle! No, they go out and decide to kill Jesus because he broke their rules; and here we see what happens...and it can still happen today, Dave...when rules become more important than people.

DAVE BAST

Yes, absolutely; even rules that we claim are based on God's Word or God's Law; and you are right. This is a wonderful illustration of Mark's subtlety, and you can so often, as we will see in this series repeatedly...we will try to point this out where it happens...you read through a story kind of quickly, as Mark tells it, and you miss the finer points—the details. So, here Mark stresses: They watched him closely...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

To see what he would do. As you say, clearly a setup. They had already...these are now the religious and political kind of authority figures in Jesus' culture...so, they were already somewhat upset with him, because in Chapter 2, there is a famous story of Jesus healing a crippled man, who was let down through the roof of the house, where he [Jesus] was teaching; but before he healed him, he said, "Your sins are forgiven," and you know, you can just hear them whispering: Psst; who does he think he is? Only God can forgive sins. And now, they are going to conspire to get together because Jesus has committed this, in their eyes, heinous sin of breaking the Sabbath.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And again, Jesus knew he was being set up; and it is interesting to read here that...Mark is known also for colorful language, and very vivid language...and we are told here Jesus is angry and deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts. Jesus knows he is being set up, and he is being set up by people who should know better—people who should be more interested in God's power and God's glory than their own take on Sabbath rules and regulations; and it angers him...it deeply, deeply troubles him.

You know, we sometimes think Jesus was always kind on an even keel and kind of passive, but no...

DAVE BAST

Gentle Jesus, meek and mild.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; he is upset here, and it speaks a lot, because you know, one thing the Bible makes clear is that what the Gospel is about...what God has been about from the beginning with the Covenant, is a relationship with our Creator—a living, loving relationship with God. What Jesus is encountering here is religion...religion in the worst sense of the word...of rules and structures that become more important than a living relationship with God, and with God's image bearers.

DAVE BAST

Right; a little bit later in Mark...in Mark Chapter 7, Jesus will declare to these same religious types, the Pharisees...Dale Bruner in his great commentary on Matthew calls them the “Serious” quote-unquote. These are the people who are really gung-ho for religion, and they sort of express their religion by making these rules up. It was sometimes referred to as fencing the law. So, you’ve got a commandment that says: Remember the Sabbath day. Keep it holy. And they said: Well, now; we are not supposed to work on the Sabbath, so what constitutes work? So, we better build this set of fences so that...they are like tripwires, you know...if we don’t do that, then we are not breaking the commandment...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And Jesus says in Mark 2:27, 28 “The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath,” you know? “Man wasn’t made for the Sabbath, the Sabbath was made for man.” This is for human beings...for their flourishing, for their restoration. It is so that you don’t work people to death...you don’t work your servants to death...you don’t even work your animals to death. You relax and rejoice in it. It is for doing good; and that is what Jesus was trying to get them to see, and they hate him all the more for it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and of course, if they had, even for a moment, accepted Jesus’ identity or began to suspect that he really is the Son of God in their midst...the very Creator...they might have thought: Hmm, maybe what this is doing is giving us an occasion to rethink our religious rules; but of course, they don’t believe it. They didn’t believe he had the authority to forgive sins in Mark 2, as you mentioned a moment ago, Dave. They didn’t believe in that; and therefore, they didn’t think that this man had to authority to reinterpret the Sabbath on the fly either. *They* knew the truth, and so they rejected Jesus; and again, this is a pattern all through Mark; and it will, of course, conclude, as all the gospels do, with Jesus finally getting killed; but it is an important pattern, and it is an important reminder, I think, even to the Church today that we don’t let rules become more important than people...

DAVE BAST

Than people, right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that we stay open to what Jesus is trying to teach us also today, and not say: Now wait a minute; what you seem to be saying here, Jesus, is not in our rulebook, so we are not going to listen.

DAVE BAST

And as you mentioned, Scott, there is a pattern, and it is a growing pattern, first of misunderstanding...some think he’s crazy; then of a sort of rejection, and here it becomes outright hostility; but we are going to see this really climax later in the Gospel of Mark with a kind of rejection, which is actually horrifying, and that is where we will turn next.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And Dave, we are in the final part of this program—program number two in a six-part series on Mark's Gospel—considering today, Mark's pattern of rejection and misunderstanding where Jesus is concerned. We have seen his family reject him; we have seen the religious establishment reject him; we have seen misunderstanding all around; but it does get rather serious on something that we sometimes refer to as the unpardonable sin, where the rejection of Jesus gets so bad, they actually accuse him of being in league with the devil.

DAVE BAST

Right; and that is a story that is told in Matthew as well as Mark. Mark tells it in Chapter 3, which has kind of been the focus of this program primarily. So, here is another passage from that same chapter, Mark 3, beginning at verse 22: And the teachers of the Law who came down...so, incidentally, we have already seen the Pharisees here, who were seriously religious people; the Herodians...we didn't say anything about them, but in the previous segment, they started to talk to the Pharisees about cooperating to kill Jesus; they were secularists...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

They were followers of Herod, the king of Galilee; now we see the third group, the teachers of the Law—the professors of theology—the official religious authorities. ²²So, they come down from Jerusalem to Galilee, and they said, “He is possessed by Beelzebul; by the prince of demons he is driving out demons.” ²³So Jesus called them over to him and began to speak to them in parables. “How can Satan drive out Satan?” ²⁴If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. ²⁶And if Satan opposes himself, and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come. ²⁷In fact, no one can enter a strong man's house without first tying him up. Then he can plunder the strong man's house.”

SCOTT HOEZEE

²⁸“Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven for all their sins and every slander they utter; ²⁹but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven. They are guilty of an eternal sin.” ³⁰And he said this because they were saying, “He has an impure spirit.”

DAVE BAST

So, there it is; what Mark calls an eternal sin, or as you said, Scott, it is often referred to as the unpardonable sin. I don't know about you, but I remember hearing about this a long time ago. I was probably a youngster. It is a little bit unnerving, even worrying. You think, wow, could I have done that? Could I have done a sin so bad that it cannot be forgiven?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and of course, Dave, as a pastor I...and I am sure you as a pastor have also encountered people who fret that very question; and sort of our standard line...and it is not meant to be cheeky...it is not cheeky...but kind of our standard line is: Well, if you worried you committed it, you didn't do it. If you are that spiritually serious that that would disturb you, I am sure you didn't do it; and indeed, that is likely to be true, because why could there possibly be a sin that couldn't be forgiven? Well, because what Jesus is saying here is that if you chalk up the work of God to the devil, if you really are so bad off that you call good evil, then there is no reaching you. That is blasphemy. What does blasphemy do? Well, blasphemy steals symbols from God and corrupts them, leaving God with no language with which to reach you. It is like the Ku Klux Klan turning the cross into a symbol of hate. That is blasphemy because it deprives God of one of the main symbols of his love—the cross. So, if you live in such a moral inversion...such a morally upside down world that you would actually call the work of God the work of Satan, there is no reaching you. That is a very radical state of being. It is not even totally clear that he would say the teachers of the Law are fully guilty of that, but they are in danger of it.

DAVE BAST

Yes, I don't think he is necessarily condemning them eternally and irrevocably either, even in this warning to them; because in saying this to them...and you notice, he starts with a parable, Mark says, and it is really kind of a series of parabolic statements. If you think about it, what you are suggesting is absurd because all these signs that I am performing—all these miracles are actually attacks against the kingdom of Satan.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right, yes.

DAVE BAST

I am casting demons out of people who are oppressing them. I am healing the sick because sickness is a sign of sin and disorder. It is absurd to suggest that I am doing this by the power of Satan because...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, I've got the devil on the run.

DAVE BAST

Yes, exactly. So...and then he says, kind of reassuringly: You know, all kinds of sins can be forgiven; really, any and every sin can be forgiven, except this final descent into the blasphemous suggestion that God himself is evil.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and if you really do...and I think, thankfully, not too many people ever get there...but if you really do descend to that level, then there again, you cannot be forgiven partly because there is no language with which God could reach you anymore. If God reached out to you with his grace...if you regarded God's grace as something evil, well then, what hope could there be? But again, Dave, just to kind of wrap things up here and why we are looking at this, as you said at the head of this program, Dave, the main question in the Gospel of Mark is who is Jesus? And we see that...you know, really all through Mark nobody understands Jesus. Nobody gets Jesus; and Jesus himself, for reasons we will talk about in the next program, conceals his identity at times, too, so that people don't foist false definitions of the Messiah onto him; but it is a pattern all through Mark. Nobody understands Jesus until you get to the soldier at the cross, who at long last says: Surely this is the Son of God; and he said it only when Jesus was dead, because that was the full disclosure of his identity. So, we continue in Mark's Gospel to be challenged to let Jesus tell us who he is.

DAVE BAST

Exactly; and really, that is probably the point of the Gospel, to keep confronting us with these various misunderstandings, these various acts of rejection. None of them final yet...there is another thing about this eternal sin, or unforgivable sin. It is never there until you have absolutely ended your life in defiance against Jesus and no longer have the opportunity to repent. So, there is always this sense that we can acknowledge Jesus, we can recognize who he is, fall on our knees and worship him; thanks be to God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Scott Hoezee and Dave Bast, and we hope you will join us again next time as Dr. Gary Burge joins us to discuss the theme of Jesus' secrecy as to his identity of the Son of God in Mark's Gospel.

Connect with us at our website, groundworkonline.com, and share what *Groundwork* means to you, or tell us what you would like to hear discussed next on *Groundwork*.

***Correction:** The audio of this program misstates the reference for this passage as Mark 7. The correct reference is Mark 2:27, 28.

<https://groundworkonline.com/episodes/jesus-misunderstood-and-rejected>

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