

Prepare for Invasion

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[0:00] Well, please open a copy of the Bible with me to Mark chapter 3. It's on page 838 of the Blue Church Bible.

Mark chapter 3, we're reading from verse 7 to the end of the chapter this evening. Mark chapter 3 from verse 7.

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 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.

[1:20] And he went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him. And he appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, so that they might be with him, and he might send them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons.

And he appointed the twelve. Simon, to whom he gave the name Peter. James, the son of Zebedee. And John, the brother of James, to whom he gave the name Boanages, that is, sons of thunder.

Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James, the son of Arthias, and Thaddeus, and Simon the zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

Then he went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, He is out of his mind.

And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, He is possessed by Beelzebul, and by the prince of demons he casts out the demons.

[2:35] And he called them to him and said to them in parables, How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand.

And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end.

But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house. Truly I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter.

But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin. For they were saying, He has an unclean spirit.

And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, Your mother and your brothers are outside seeking ye.

[3:46] And he answered them, Who are my mother and my brothers? And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, Here are my mother and my brothers.

For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother. Amen. Amen. Amen. The words of the Lord Jesus Christ, the words of the living God.

Let us pray as we come to them now. Lord, as we have just sung, you are the author of creation. You are the Lord of every man.

And as we hear your cry of love ring out to us tonight, here in this place, we ask that you would subdue our hearts under your rule, that you would restrain and take captive every stray thought, Lord, that you would bring us, if we are not already, into the kingdom of your Son, the Lord Jesus.

For he truly is the Christ, the Son of God. And it is in his name that we ask these things. Amen.
Well, it was great to have Andy with us last week from Charleston.

[5:01] And he stole my Lord of the Rings opening. So I had to go back and find another illustration to begin with tonight. But it wasn't difficult because every great story, really when you think about it, is a version or a variation of the greatest story ever told.

Dune Part 3 comes out at Christmas. I'm looking forward to that. We watched Dune Part 2 the other week, therefore, and it ends with an absolutely epic scene.

I think we're out of the spoiler zone now. Paul, the hero, has just finished fighting a string of battles against the forces of the evil empire and won every round.

Finally, he demands the emperor kneel and kiss his ring and acknowledge his victory. But no sooner has he taken the throne than the news comes in the great houses refuse to honor your ascendancy.

See, every step Paul has taken closer to victory has only angered his rivals, the other ruling families, to the point where they would rather now destroy him than see him rule over them.

[6:19] Paul's small ragtag army await his command. Will they run? Hide? Cower? No.

Lead them to paradise, he says. And the starships go up to take on the great houses and bring them under his lordship. We're only at the end of chapter 3 of Mark's gospel, but have you noticed every week we've been in this gospel so far, we've heard about conflict, hostility towards Jesus.

No sooner has he been announced as the son of God, then immediately he's driven into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. His first Sabbath teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum, immediately there is a man there with an unclean spirit saying, what have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?

I know who you are. Jesus forgives a man's sins in a house one day and immediately the religious scribes are thinking, why does this man talk like this?

He's blaspheming. Who can forgive sins but God alone? And then a whole string of conflicts as we saw last Sunday with the Pharisees.

[7:40] Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners? Why do your disciples not fast? Why are they doing what's not lawful on the Sabbath? Each time Jesus has exposed their confusion, their hypocrisy, until finally we saw at the end of last week's passage in chapter 3, verse 6, the Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

How to destroy him. The great houses, the rulers of this world, have seen Jesus' authority over demons, over sickness, over sin.

But the more they see, the more they are angered by him. They do not honor his lordship. So what does Jesus do in response?

Well, tonight, we see him appoint 12 heralds of his kingdom to spread his authority and message even further, and then he tells his opponents unapologetically that he intends to continue to plunder their house.

In other words, Jesus steps up the offensive. His message in our passage tonight is essentially, prepare for invasion.

[9:00] Not an armed invasion, but the invasion of God's good and loving rule into the corrupt and fallen kingdom of this world, beginning with his own people.

What are your orders, Jesus? Lead them to paradise. Preach and proclaim my lordship. Plunder the prisons and dungeons and houses and synagogues and temples where my people are held captive.

Storm the forts of darkness with the light of the gospel. It's interesting. If you've been gripped by the drama of Mark's gospel so far, Jesus says, you've hardly seen anything yet.

Tonight, brothers and sisters, Mark wants us to see clearly again who Jesus is and why he came and think carefully then about whose side we're on.

Do we recognize and honor Jesus' kingship? If so, how do we do that? Do we take issue with him, what he says, what he does?

[10:08] Or perhaps are we somewhere in the middle? We're going to meet a few groups of people tonight who will help us think that through. So let's just get straight into our first point then.

A reconstituted kingdom. Verses 7 to 21. The first groups we meet here are the disciples and the crowd. See that in verse 7.

Then Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the sea and a great crowd followed. We're going to see more of the disciples in a bit, but notice even now that there's a distinction.

Some have their L-plates on already. They are learners or disciples of Jesus. Most, though, are tagging along. They are the crowd. Now, the crowd in the gospel, it's the hardest group to define. Three things, though, we do know from these verses. Number one, it is a great crowd from a large and significant area. From Tyre and Sidon in the north to Jerusalem, Judea, Idumea in the south, and Galilee somewhere in the middle.

[11:18] This crowd is drawn from the four corners of what once was King David's ancient kingdom. Very uncharacteristically for me, I have some pictures for you.

Gaze upon these maps. To illustrate this point, it's significant, isn't it, in terms of what Mark's showing us about who Jesus is, that he wants us to know that Jesus following the crowd is drawn from the top to the bottom of the extent of King David's kingdom because Jesus is the promised Christ, the royal son of God.

Jesus even compared himself with David last Sunday in chapter two. If David did it, so can I. Mark wants us to see Jesus has a rightful claim to the ancient kingdom of his father, David.

That's enough pictures. Got to wait another five years for the next one, right? Number two, the crowd is confused.

The reason they are tagging along with Jesus and his disciples is because, for a sake, they had heard all that he was doing. What has Jesus done? So far, Jesus has preached, Jesus has cleansed, Jesus has forgiven, Jesus has called, Jesus has welcomed, Jesus has healed.

[12:47] The crowd hears all that and says, we want more healing, please, Jesus. Verse 10, for he had healed many so that all who had diseases pressed around him to touch him.

Already Jesus has said at this stage that preaching is what his public ministry was about.

Remember, back in chapter one, he could have healed more people where he was, but the other towns needed to hear his gospel, he said, and that took priority.

We're going to see that again in a minute, but the crowds do not see his priority. They want to pick the thing they want from the Jesus menu, not take Jesus himself on his own terms.

They want the icing, if you like, not the cake. And three, the crowd is getting in the way without necessarily meaning to.

I wonder, were you surprised, as I was, when we read that Jesus, the Son of God, said he's concerned about being crushed to the point where he has his disciples get a boat for him so that he can get a bit of space?

[14:03] It's an incredibly claustrophobic scene. Indeed, later in verse 20, the crowd is so intense, Jesus and his disciples couldn't even eat. See, in their confusion, the crowd actually makes Jesus' work harder, not easier, which, in the context of the conflicts we've seen so far, isn't a neutral thing.

They are, at best, unwitting pawns in a wider spiritual warfare against Jesus and his coming kingdom. And that conflict is only just under the surface, verse 11, because there are unclean spirits in the crowd, muddying the water around Jesus by proclaiming the truth about him, you are the Son of God, but that's not what people need to hear from the mouth of a demon.

And Jesus stamps it out before it can spread. All of that, okay, the echoes of the kingdom, the general confusion, the background conflict, that is a really important backdrop to have in place to understand what Jesus does now, verse 13.

He went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him. I reckon this is one of the bits in the Gospels that people think, what on earth is he going to do with this?

Lots of preachers wonder that. I wondered that earlier this week. I've heard helpful sermons preached on the names of the twelve apostles where the point has been something like this.

[15:49] We don't know much about all these guys, some of them we don't know at all, but we do know is that they often got it wrong and failed Jesus, but Jesus chose them anyway.

Application, just like us. Anonymous, unimportant, failures, but Jesus wants us on his team.

Friends, that is wonderfully, gloriously true. It has been since the beginning with these twelve guys, and it's still true now. It's true. We don't qualify to be on Jesus' team, but he calls us to be, and his call is enough for anyone.

Whatever our past, whatever our present, whatever comes in the future, that is true. But context is king, as we say, and it's the context that helps us see the much bigger thing that's going on in these

verses.

see how aggressive it is what Jesus does. The great mass of humanity is trying to distract him. Demons are spreading confusion.

[17:02] Religious leaders are plotting to destroy him for what he's doing and saying. What's Jesus' response? More of the same. Multiply.

Much more of the same. Twelve times gospel preachers, twelve times his authority. He appointed twelve so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons.

The enemy is switching around and mixing tactics, trying everything, throwing everything at Jesus to obstruct him and his kingdom. and Jesus just cranks up the volume to drown out the noise.

Friends, that is still Jesus' strategy today. How many times have you heard it said over the last ten or fifteen years, the world has changed and we need to keep up?

If we want to reach young people today, we need to do X. If we want to stay relevant, we have to start Y. People don't respond to Z anymore.

[18:13] We need to move away from that. In other words, the enemy's tactics have changed, so let us change ours too. And so we start prioritizing other things in response to what the crowd wants the church to do or the lies, the kind of lies that people believe today or the political environment that we live in.

Do you know there was some research done in 2024 by the Evangelical Alliance? You can read the report, it's called Finding Jesus, just published. They surveyed 280 people in the UK who had become a Christian over the last five years.

What would you guess are the top three things that those people said helped them as they explored the Christian faith? I'll tell you.

Attending church in person, reading the Bible, and an evangelistic talk course or small group. For most people who responded, it was two out of those three things.

Attending church in person was the only thing that more than 50% of people chose. church where preaching happens and time with God's family.

[19:40] The Bible where God speaks, evangelistic courses like Christianity Explored where we talk about Jesus. Those stats tally with what we're seeing ourselves here in our church and in other churches, aren't they?

Some of you can relate to those statistics. So much confusion, so much change, so many distractions. What does Jesus do? Crank up the volume on preaching the Bible and the gospel. It's the world, isn't it? It's the kingdom of darkness that needs to keep churning through different strategies because still to this day, it hasn't found one that will destroy Jesus and his kingdom. Meanwhile, Jesus' strategy remains as reliable as ever. friends, Jesus' appointment of the twelve reminds us we must never back down from preaching and teaching the Bible and particularly the good news of Jesus Christ ever.

We must never confuse good works with the absolute priority of proclaiming Christ. With Jesus and the apostles, we must say in the face of confusion and opposition, more of the same, multiply, more gospel preaching, more gospel preachers, more gospel witness from more of the church, more Christianity explored, more evangelistic one-to-ones.

[21:13] People are not less confused and distracted today than they were back then, so we cannot need less of those things, can we? To plunder the strong man's house, we don't need different tools, we need more of the same tools and people trained to use them.

As Simon alluded to this morning, we try to weave that training through church life so that we're all getting some. If you're interested in being better trained to share the gospel, to handle God's word, come and speak to us, we'd love to talk about that with you.

He appointed twelve so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach. In passing, their authority to cast out demons is not a separate thing from their preaching.

Jesus' own deliverance ministry was his teaching ministry. It's interesting, isn't it? He cast out demons by his teaching with authority.

So today, those are not different things. How are demons dealt with? Not the kind of chaotic screaming and incantations that you see on YouTube. No, the grip of darkness on a person's heart is broken as the gospel is clearly taught by the power of the Holy Spirit.

[22:35] He sent them out to preach and have authority over demons. And there's something else we need to see before we move on. Because this is not only a strategic move on Jesus' part, it marks a historic shift.

See, when else have twelve been called to a mountain to be given a new identity and purpose? If you follow our morning series in Exodus, there's a clue.

The twelve tribes of Israel were called by God to Mount Sinai. They're to be told they are his treasured possession, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

Notice here though, verse 13, it is now the Lord Jesus calling from up the mountain, as the Lord God did in history. Instead of the twelve tribes, it's twelve guys.

They too are given a new identity. He named them apostles. Some of them even get new names. Simon becomes Peter, James and John, the sons of thunder.

[23:46] And they're given a new purpose, aren't they, to be with him and be sent out by him. By the way, that's just what the word apostle means, one who's sent out. It's clear to us by now in Mark's gospel that the old covenant kingdom of Israel has fallen into darkness and ruin.

We know that because her promised king has come, and the leaders of that nation, who were supposed to be prepared for him, have already decided to destroy him. With that in the background, what Jesus is doing with the twelve is remarkable.

This, he says, is Israel 2.0. He's taken them back to the beginning. Twelve meet the Lord on a mountain, but not the tribes this time, the apostles.

The Lord is starting again with a new covenant people. To be clear, he's very much building on the old. All the apostles, including later Paul, are ethnically Jewish, but by appointing these twelve, he is redrawing the boundaries of his kingdom, not around a nation, but around those who have given their personal allegiance to him as their king.

This move signals the beginning of the end of the old covenant with its temple, its sacrifices, its nation, its leaders, and the beginning of the new with its people under the preaching of the apostles, following its king, Jesus Christ.

[25:27] So, application, if we want to be part of God's kingdom now, we must come not through the crumbling religion of old Israel, but rather through the message that the apostles were sent out by Jesus to preach.

The time is here, God's kingdom is near, repent, and believe the gospel. A reconstituted kingdom, which is set over a surprising coalition.

second point, where we see this shift even more starkly. Because in verse 22, we meet another group, the scribes from Jerusalem.

These are basically religious lawyers from the capital. They come down from Jerusalem saying, verse 22, about Jesus, he's possessed by Beelzebul. If you're wondering who that is, Mark helpfully gives us another quote.

By the prince of demons, he casts out demons. Yes, that is right. They're saying that Jesus is in league with the devil. In the next verse, Jesus called them to him.

[26:40] It's interesting, isn't it? They're not saying that to his face. It's what they're saying behind his back. But the news has reached Jesus, so he calls them to him, and he does three things in this meeting.

One is that he utterly takes apart their accusation about him working with the devil. And it doesn't take him very long. How can Satan cast out Satan?

It's another name for the devil in the Bible. Think about what you're saying. He says, why on earth would the devil be freeing people from demonic possession?

Why would he be working against himself? It's even more crazy when you translate the word Satan. It comes from a Hebrew word that means adversary or opponent.

So Jesus is saying, how can the opponent be his own opponent? It would be like a football team just repeatedly kicking the ball into their own net.

[27:38] Or an army setting fire to their tanks and missiles. It doesn't make any sense, does it, to accuse Jesus of being possessed by the devil because he casts out demons.

demons. But the thinness of their insult only serves to expose the underlying issue. That's the second thing Jesus does. Why are they slandering him for casting out demons?

Do we wonder that? Surely that's a good thing in anyone's book. Everyone else is loving it. Jesus, get the demons out of my kids. Jesus, get the demons out of me.

But you know, maybe that's just it. Don't the scribes want their people and their synagogues and land to be rid of demonic activity? Perhaps, but not by Jesus.

See, they didn't mind that demons were running rampant as long as people still listen to them. Remember back in the synagogue in chapter 1, Jesus was preaching. Suddenly there's a guy with an unclean spirit.

[28:41] Jesus says the word, and immediately that man is free from the demon. And everyone in the synagogue said, what is this?

A new teaching with authority. He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him. They were astonished, we read, at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority and not as their scribes.

Brackets. The scribes can't cast out demons. Jesus outranks them in authority. Let's follow his teaching. Hence the crowd, right, that's come from near and far just to touch Jesus and be healed. The scribes are hemorrhaging followers. Their synagogues are empty on a Saturday because Jesus' teaching has authority that theirs does not have. So what's the real issue?

Popularity. Influence. How many followers? They don't like the numbers that they're seeing. How do we know that that's the issue?

[29:57] Well, because Jesus says quite plainly that that's exactly why he's casting out demons in the first place. Listen to this, verse 26 and 27. If Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand but is coming to an end.

But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house. If you want to rob a house, I assume that you have to do something about the six foot six twenty stone body builder coming down the stairs with a crowbar.

You can't take his valuables until he's tied to the radiator in the corner. The strong man in Jesus' parable is clearly Satan, the devil.

Jesus says he's come into Satan's house. He's first had to bind Satan, overpower him by casting out him and his minions so that now he can plunder Satan's house.

Why is that such a provocative thing for him to say? Because of course the plunder that Jesus has taken from the devil are the people who used to have demons in the synagogue.

[31:10] Once imprisoned by the devil under the teaching of their scribes, now set free to follow Jesus. Who's in league with the devil really?

We saw before Jesus' kingdom is bringing the corrupt and fallen old covenant kingdom of Israel to an end. Guess what else is coming to an end? Verse 26. Satan.

Satan's rule and reign over people. Can you hear how unbelievably provocative that is? For Mark's first readers, this would have been jaw-dropping. The Pharisees are in bed with the Herodians and the scribes are in bed with Satan.

That's why they're not delighted that Jesus is casting out demons because they can see that the end of Satan's power spells the end of their own. And the last thing Jesus does in this meeting is spell out just how wicked it is, what they're saying.

Verse 28. Truly I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man and whatever blasphemies they utter. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin, for they were saying he has an unclean spirit.

[32:35] We get a bit scared of these verses, don't we? They're scary verses. But Jesus does not mean to scare his people. Look what he's saying.

He will forgive those who come to him. All sins will be forgiven the children of man. And whatever blasphemies they utter.

We've seen one of the things Jesus has authority to do is forgive sins. Here the one who can forgive say he will forgive all sins and blasphemies.

If you're worried that you've said or done something that Jesus won't forgive, take it from Jesus. If you've said sorry to him, he's forgiven ye.

If you ask him for forgiveness, he will forgive. Because one thing we know, if you're guilty of the unforgivable sin, you would never ask his forgiveness.

[33:38] Read in with me from verse 29. Whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin. For they were saying he has an unclean spirit.

To be clear, they are calling the Holy Spirit, by whose power Jesus is casting out demons, unclean. They are saying God himself is spiritually dirty because they are attributing the work of Jesus to the devil.

Friends, anyone who says that Jesus' works are evil are not at the same time going to ask him to forgive them. That's why it's unforgivable because you can't say that and be forgiven at the same time.

It's just, it's an impossibility. So the point is not to scare us. Even if at one point you have thought or said that Jesus is doing the devil's work and repent of that, I trust there is forgiveness.

The point is to show us as readers how far gone the religious scribes were. They've seen Jesus' authority. They've had opportunities to repent.

[34 : 57] And yet they have set themselves against him and say that the good he's doing is really evil. That's where they've landed.

Now, I don't know about you, I've never heard anyone say anything quite as blunt as that. I have come across videos online of so-called pastors saying that Jesus sinned and got things wrong. That the plain meaning of Jesus' teaching is wicked and can't possibly be what he meant. That he was rude and unkind to people.

I fear that that is scribe-level callousness in the face of Jesus' authority in accusing him and the Holy Spirit of doing wrong. Jesus would remind us here that even a church can become Satan's house if his lies are preached from the pulpit.

If you were in a church where that was taught, it's time to find a new church. That's why Jesus began again with a new Israel because the old one is calling God unclean.

[36 : 12] Three groups, three responses to Jesus. The scribes, the crowd, the disciples. Friends, as you listen, which side are you on tonight?

Perhaps one or two of you do accuse Jesus in your heart of doing wrong. Whether doing wrong generally or wrong by you. I wonder, is that because you have considered really who Jesus is and what he came to do?

Or because pointing the finger at him is easier than really grappling with his authority and his claim over your life. Jesus warns us very starkly not to make the same mistake as the scribes and end up so hardened against him that our rebellion is unforgivable because we crave influence and control over our own lives and resent his good and loving rule.

Some of us might be somewhere in between unsure what we make of Jesus. Let me say you're in the right place to think it through. This is only the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God.

We have much more to see. Keep coming. Keep inquiring. Keep grappling. Ask people what they think around you. Don't stop listening.

[37 : 38] But at what point do we know that we are his disciples? Well, Jesus finishes this section with a wonderful demonstration. At this point his mother Mary and his brothers are outside.

Not just physically but spiritually too. Earlier they tried to section him. He's out of his mind they said. Surprisingly they too seem to be part of that coalition.

If only on the fringes and only for now. But Jesus takes the opportunity to show what his kingdom is really made of by pointing to the people sitting around him in the house and saying verse 35 here are my mother and my brothers for whoever does the will of God he is my brother and sister and mother.

How do we know if we're in with Jesus? Because that's where we'll be found sitting at the feet of Jesus under his authority and taking in his teaching.

But friends that is the will of God that we see Jesus rightly as the Christ the son of God clearly grasp his message and what he came to do and therefore respond by resting our faith in him alone as our own personal king and savior.

[39 : 03] if that is you tonight that I've just described know that as Jesus looks at you he says brother sister as he sees us here he says my family my people my kingdom wonderfully that is true if we have repented turned from our sin and believed in Jesus that he is the true king come to save us into his kingdom of spiritual freedom and eternal life and that invitation and his forgiveness is open to everyone he would do that turn from their sin turn to him as their own lord and savior let's thank him then and pray for that together let us pray lord Jesus we thank you so much for your glorious invasion into our world into our lives we praise you for you are truly the king that we all have needed and the one that our world has rejected lord we confess once we too walked in

darkness and rejected you we thank you that by your grace you have saved us brought us from the kingdom of darkness into the glorious kingdom of light and life we thank you so much that you call us your family we pray lord for those among us who as yet have not taken that step to sit at the feet of Jesus to listen to his teaching to have them as king over them please lord draw them to yourself by your grace and lord let none of us be guilty of an unforgivable sin let none of us lord harden our hearts against you let none of us look at you and instead of seeing good see evil free us lord from that we pray spare us that by your grace set us free lord to live and follow you and we ask that in Jesus name amen amen