

**Monday Evening Bible Reading Group: Monday October 14<sup>th</sup> 2019: Mark Chapter 3: 20-35;  
Some Notes**

**Content:** Mark's only two references to Jesus' family. In the first, the family worries about Jesus' mental health. In the second, Jesus calls his followers rather than his birth family "family". In between, are two quite tricky passages. In one, Jesus deals with the accusation that he is not mad (as his family suggested) but in league with the devil. In the other, Jesus gives a striking, and hugely re-assuring, picture of God's forgiveness; but says, scarily, that some sins can not be forgiven. There is a lot to wrestle with in these 15 verses.

The obvious interpretation of "family" is Jesus' mother and his brothers and sisters. Some Christians are determined to see Mary of Nazareth as always a virgin, and therefore interpret brothers and sisters as cousins. Those same Christians might well be reluctant to think of the Mary of the Annunciation as ever "getting it wrong" about God's Son. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of all this is that Mark chooses to report the family as getting it wrong, rather than inventing Jesus as having been self-evidently divinely different for the 29 "hidden years". In the convenient myth, family and neighbours would have been following this extraordinary baby/child/teenager/young man, just waiting for the moment when he burst onto the world stage and they could sell their "We always knew..., and let me tell you about X. Y and Z " stories to the world press. Instead, a family reacts in a fairly normal sort of way to a family member chucking in his regular job, breaking all the rules, collecting together a motley crew of social misfits, and going out of his way to upset all the important people. Reassuringly, we know that, longer term, Mary stuck with Jesus to the end; and his brother/cousin James became leader of the Jerusalem Church, and paid for his faithfulness with his life.

In the Jewish tradition, families were hugely important; and Jesus saying that the family of faith was his real family was saying something that would have shocked. Down the centuries, balancing loyalty to un-believing blood family and loyalty to faith family has sometimes been hugely challenging to Christians. I have always been impressed by a JW friend who said that the non-JW spouse had an absolute right to "love, honour, obedience"; but must not expect to over-ride practice of the faith. Subject to occasional grumbles about "Off to church again? I thought we might have had an evening together!", some non-believing spouses are very tolerant of their partner's eccentricities! (If you respect your partner's hobbies, it isn't too big an ask to respect your partner's faith?)

To think about: Is there actually a Church Family, or just a group that meets briefly on Sunday morning (other things permitting)?

It seems to us weird in the extreme to condemn Jesus' miracles of healing as the work of the devil; and we can see the link with the "unforgivable sin". Calling the obviously good "bad" really is as stubbornly perverse as you can get, and you can't be forgiven if you stubbornly insist that white is black and that there is nothing to apologise for, nothing to repent about.

But, to be fair to the Pharisees, they were not saying that healing was a bad thing, just that (a) the Sabbath was a priority, and (b) Jesus was mixing healing (basically good) with throwing over essential tenets of the Jewish faith (fundamentally bad).

What do you think is unforgivable? Is it refusing forgiveness? If you have read/seen "The Lord of the Rings", does Gollum have anything to say about the "Use it, or lose it" aspect of being determined that wrong is right and right is wrong?

As an incidental issue: Do actions speak louder than words? There is a very clear strand running through the Old Testament as well as the Gospels of "faith in action". Yes, I hear what you say; but I'm a great deal more impressed by what I see you do? Quoting Jesus is good; but maybe trying to copy Jesus is even better.