

Mark: 3:22–35

From Catena Aurea:

22. And the Scribes which came down from Jerusalem said, He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils.

THEOPHYLACT. That is, He has a devil and is mad, and therefore they wished to lay hold upon Him, that they might shut Him up as one who had a devil. And even His friends wished to do this, that is, His relations, perchance His countrymen, or His brethren. ¹But it was a silly insanity in them, to conceive that the Worker of such great miracles of Divine Wisdom had become mad.

3:23–30

23. And he called them unto him, and said unto them in parables, How can Satan cast out Satan?

24. And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand.

25. And if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand.

26. And if Satan rise up against himself, and be divided, he cannot stand, but hath an end.

27. No man can enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he will first bind the strong man; and then he will spoil his house.

28. Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewithsoever they shall blaspheme:

29. But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation:

30. Because they said, He hath an unclean spirit.

GLOSS. (non occ.) And because He has already shewn by an example that a devil cannot cast out a devil, He shews how he can be expelled, saying, No man can enter into a strong man's house, &c.

THEOPHYLACT. The meaning of the example is this: The devil is the strong man; his goods are the men into whom he is received; unless therefore a man first conquers the devil, how can he deprive him of his goods, that is, of the men whom he has possessed? So also I who spoil his goods, that is, free men from suffering by his possession, first spoil the devils and vanquish them, and am their enemy. How then can ye say that I have Beelzebub, and that being the friend of the devils, I cast them out?

THEOPHYLACT. We must however understand, that they will not obtain pardon unless they repent. But since it was at the flesh of Christ that they were offended, even though they did not repent, some excuse was allowed them, and they obtained some remission.

AUGUSTINE. (Serm. 71, 12, 21) Or else impenitence itself is the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost which hath no remission. For either in his thought or by his tongue, he speaks a word against the Holy Ghost the forgiver of sins, who treasures up for himself an impenitent heart. But he subjoins, Because they said, He hath an unclean spirit, that he might shew that His reason for saying it, was their declaring that He cast out a devil by Beelzebub, not because there is a blasphemy, which cannot be remitted since even this might be remitted through a right repentance: but the cause why this sentence was put forth by the Lord, after mentioning the unclean spirit, (who as our Lord shews was divided against himself,) was, that the Holy Ghost even makes those whom He brings together undivided, by His remitting those sins, which divided them from Himself, which gift of remission is resisted by no one, but him who has the hardness of an impenitent heart. For in another place, the Jews said of the Lord, that He had a devil, (John 7:20.) without however His saying any thing there about the blasphemy against the Spirit; and the reason is, that they did not there cast in His teeth the unclean spirit, in such a way, that that spirit could by their own words be shewn to be divided against Himself, as Beelzebub was here shewn to be, by their saying, that it might be he who cast out devilso.

3:31–35

31. There came then his brethren and his mother, and, standing without, sent unto him, calling him.

32. And the multitude sat about him, and they said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren without seek for thee.

33. And he answered them, saying, Who is my mother, or my brethren?

34. And he looked round about on them which sat about him, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren!

35. For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother.

THEOPHYLACT. Because the relations of the Lord had come to seize upon Him, as if beside Himself, His mother, urged by the sympathy of her love, came to Him; wherefore it is said, And there came unto him his mother, and, standing without, sent unto him, calling him.

CHRYSOSTOM. (non occ.) From this it is manifest that His brethren and His mother were not always with Him; but because He was beloved by them, they come from reverence and affection, waiting without. Wherefore it goes on, And the multitude sat about him, &c.

CHRYSOSTOM. (non occ.) By this, the Lord shews that we should honour those who are relations by faith rather than those who are relations by blood. A man indeed is made the mother of Jesus by preaching Him; for He, as it were, brings forth the Lord, when he pours Him into the heart of his hearers.

THEOPHYLACT. He does not therefore say this, as denying His mother, but as shewing that He is worthy of honour, not only because she bore Christ, but on account of her possessing every other virtue.

From Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture:

3:23 How Can Satan Cast Out Satan?

The Demonic Intent to Dominate the Will.

Augustine: Now as for the Lord's saying: "Satan cannot drive out Satan," lest perhaps anyone using the name of some of the lowest powers when driving out a demon should think this opinion of the Lord's to be false, let him understand the point of this saying: Satan does spare the body or the senses of the body, but he tempts the senses for the purpose of dominating the will of the man in question, in a triumph of greater import, through the error of impiety. Satan does not strike for the body as such, but rather for the innermost self in order to work in him in the manner described by the apostle: "according to the prince of the power of this air, who is now active in the sons of disobedience." For Satan was not troubling and tormenting the senses of their bodies, nor was he battering their bodies, but he was reigning in their wills, or better, in their covetousness. *Eighty-Three Different Questions, Question 79.2.*

3:25 A House Divided Against Itself

The Spirit Unites Those Divided Against Themselves.

Augustine: Mention has been made of the unclean spirit whom the Lord shows to be divided against himself. The Holy Spirit, however, is not divided against himself. Rather he makes those whom he gathers together undivided against themselves, by dwelling within those who have been cleansed, that they may be like those of whom it is written in the Acts of the Apostles, "The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul." Sermons on the New Testament Lessons 21.35.

3:27a The Strong Man's House

The Devil's Goods.

Augustine: The "strong man" in this passage means the devil who was able to hold the human race in bondage. By his "goods," which Christ was coming to plunder, the devil was keeping for himself those who would in time become faithful, but had remained in the clutches of ungodliness and various sins. It was for the purpose of binding up this strong man that John, in the Apocalypse, saw "an angel coming down from heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, the ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years." The angel checked and repressed his power to seduce and possess those destined to be set free. The City of God 20.7.

Weakness Made Strong.

Augustine: He conquered the devil first by righteousness, and then by power. First by righteousness, because he who had no sin was slain by him most unjustly. But then by power, because having been dead he lived again, never afterwards to die. For Christ was crucified, not through immortal power, but through the weakness which he took upon him in mortal flesh. Of this weakness the apostle nevertheless says, "God's weakness is stronger than human strength." On the Trinity 13.14.18.

Cross as Victory.

Augustine: It is not difficult, therefore, to see how the devil was conquered when he, who was slain by him, rose again. But there is something greater and more profound of comprehension: to see how the devil was conquered precisely when he was thought to be conquering, namely, when Christ was crucified.

For at that moment the blood of him who had no sin at all, was shed for the remission of our sins. The devil deservedly held those whom he had bound by sin to the condition of death. So it happened that One who was guilty of no sin freed them justly from this condemnation. The strong man was conquered by this paradoxical justice and bound by this chain, that his vessels might be taken away. Those vessels which had been vessels of wrath were turned into vessels of mercy. On the Trinity 13.15.19.

3:27b Then Indeed He May Plunder His House

The Same Chains.

Irenaeus: The adversary enticed humanity to transgress our maker's law, and thereby got us into his clutches. Yet his power consisted only in tempting the human will toward trespass and apostasy. With these chains he bound up the human will. This is why in the economy of salvation it was necessary that he be bound with the same chains by which he had bound humanity. It would be through a man that humanity would be set free to return to the Lord, leaving the adversary in those bonds by which he himself had been fettered, that is, sin. For when Satan is bound, man is set free; since "none can enter a strong man's house and spoil his goods, unless he first bind the strong man himself." It is in this way that he became exposed as the opposer of the Word who made all things, and subdued by his command. The new man showed him to be a fugitive from the law, and an apostate from God. He then was securely bound as a fugitive, and his goods hauled away. These goods are those who had been in bondage, whom he had unjustly used for his own purposes. So it was a just means by which he was led captive, who had led humanity into captivity unjustly. In this way humanity was rescued from the clutches of its possessor by the tender mercy of God the Father, who had compassion on his own handiwork, and gave to it salvation, restoring it by means of the Word, Christ, in order that humanity might learn from this actual event that they receive incorruptibility not of themselves, but by the free gift of God. Against Heresies 5.21.3.

3:28 Whoever Blasphemes Against the Holy Spirit

Turning Away from Faith.

Origen: The power of God the Father and God the Son is at work in the whole of creation. The saints are those who are fully receiving life in the Holy Spirit. Accordingly it is said, "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord except in the Holy Spirit." However unworthy the apostles might have been, they were told: "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit is come upon you." This is what is referred to by the phrase, "he

who has sinned against the Son of Man is worthy of forgiveness.” Even if one at times ceases to live according to this divine word, even if one falls into ignorance or folly, the way is not blocked to true penitence and forgiveness. But one who has once been counted worthy to share in life in the Holy Spirit and then finally turns back again in apostasy is by this very act and deed said to have blasphemed against the Holy Spirit. On First Principles 1.3.7.

The Spirit Is God.

Gregory Nazianzen: He is the subject, not the object, of hallowing, apportioning, participating, filling, sustaining. We share in him; he shares in nothing. He is our inheritance, he is glorified, counted together with Father and Son. He is a dire warning to us, the “finger of God.” The Spirit is, like God, a “fire.” This means that the Holy Spirit is of the same essential nature as the Father. The Spirit is the very One who created us and creates us anew through baptism and resurrection. The Spirit knows all things, teaches all things, moves where and when and as strongly as he wills. He leads, speaks, sends, and separates those who are vexed and tempted. He reveals, illumines, gives life, or better said, he is himself light and life. He makes us his temple, he sanctifies, he makes us complete. He both goes before baptism and follows after it. All that the Godhead actively performs, the Spirit performs. Oration 31, On the Holy Spirit 29.

Repentance for Blasphemy.

Augustine: It is not that this was a blasphemy which under no circumstances could be forgiven, for even this shall be forgiven if right repentance follows it. Sermons on New Testament Lessons 21.35.

3:32 His Mother and His Brothers Came

Ordering the Relation to Family.

Augustine: It is he who said that no one belongs to his family except those who do the will of his Father. To be sure, he graciously included Mary herself in this number, for she was doing the will of his Father. Thus he spurned the earthly name of his mother in comparison to heavenly kinship.... Do not be ungrateful, pay your duty of gratitude to your mother, repay earthly favors by spiritual ones, temporal by eternal ones. Letter 243, To Laetus.

3:34 Here are My Mother and My Brothers!

3:35 Whoever Does the Will of God is My Brother, Sister, Mother

Whether Mary Was Closer to Him as Parent or Believer.

Augustine: What else does he here teach us, than to prefer to kinship “after the flesh” our descent “after the Spirit.” He teaches that persons are united by nearness of spirit to those who are just and holy, and that by obeying and following they cleave to their teaching and conduct. Therefore Mary is more blessed in receiving the faith of Christ than in conceiving the flesh of Christ. For to the one who said, “Blessed is the womb, which bore you!” he himself answered: “Blessed are they who hear the Word of God and keep it.” Concerning his own brothers, his own relatives after the flesh, who at first did not believe in him, he found dubious advantage in being their kin. As for Mary, her nearness as a mother would have been little help for her salvation if she had not borne Christ in her heart in a more blessed manner than in the flesh. On Virginitv 3.

The Ground of Mary’s Blessedness.

Augustine: She did the Father’s will. It was this in her that the Lord magnified, not merely that her flesh gave birth to flesh.... When he said, “Blessed are they who hear the Word of God and keep it,” he was in effect saying: “My mother whom you have called blessed is blessed for the reason that she keeps the Word of God, not that the Word was made flesh in her and dwelt among us, but that she keeps the very Word of God through which she was made and which was made flesh in her.” Tractate on John 10.3.2.