

SM021 – Whose Side are You On?

You're listening to Stories of the Master.

The stories of Jesus have reached into the hearts of millions. They have changed people, families, and nations. Not all have loved the stories Jesus told. Not all have honored the life He lived. Some were angry with Him, the things He did and the things He said. Others were deeply moved and found hope. What will your response be?

Today on Stories of the Master, Whose Side are You On?, and it is taken from Mark 3:20-35 and Matthew 12:22-50. I hope you will follow along in your own Bible.

My name is Jonathan, and I will be your Storyteller and Teacher.

I'm so glad you're here. Gather your friends. Come close and listen. It's time for the world to hear again the stories of the Master.

And now, Whose Side are You On?

Part 1

James, Joseph, Simon, Jude, and the sisters got together – six children talking among themselves as brothers and sisters – but their topic was not themselves. It was another brother they were talking about, someone in the family they were very concerned about. They were talking about the oldest brother of the family. They were talking about Jesus.

For a year, Jesus had been gone. He had left his carpentry business and had headed south to hear the preaching of John the prophet. That was fine to go for a period of time and to return, but it had been so long since Jesus had been home. But it's not just that he was not home. It's the other things he was doing that were concerning.

There were reports that Jesus had gone into the wilderness for many weeks – a dangerous place. And as time went on the reports kept coming in of other activities. There were rumors of miracles and preaching. One Sabbath day he had returned home and spoken in the synagogue. Again, that was fine for him to read from the Torah and to comment upon it, but when he claimed that the kingdom prophecies were going to be fulfilled in him, well, that was a family embarrassment.

The brothers and sisters often talked to their mother Mary about Jesus. But she was stubbornly defiant that they must leave Jesus alone, that he had a special mission from God, and that they had no idea how special he was. The brothers and sisters were content to let matters rest for a while. They loved their mother, Mary, as well, and did not want to upset her. But as the weeks turned into months, and Jesus had not come home, their concern grew.

One brother said, “Mother, we simply must go and get Jesus and bring him home. He is not well. Something has gone wrong with him.” Another said, “he has lost his senses. I think that he thinks that he is really the Messiah.”

Another said, “Do you know what he has done now? He has selected 12 men to be his apostles. He thinks he has authority to choose men to follow him.”

One of the sisters said, “What I am concerned about is the Pharisees. You know how influential they are. Their anger toward Jesus just seems to build and build and I heard that they are now plotting against him to kill him. Mother, please, I know how you feel about Jesus but you simply must come with us. He may not listen to us but he may listen to you. We have to go get Jesus before something bad happens to him.”

Finally, Mary said yes. She did not agree with her children. She had seen at least one miracle that he had performed – turning water into wine – and she remembered what the angel had said to her many years before that he would be the Son of the Most High God and that in him the kingdom of God would come. But how could she explain all of that to her children? They would think she was crazy if she told them those details.

Finally, they all agreed to go – the brothers and sisters to bring him home before he got hurt and to talk some sense into him, and Mary, hoping against hope that Jesus might prove himself to them and that everyone in the family would stop their bickering and worry over Jesus. Mary wanted peace at home, but most of all she wanted them to know who Jesus really was. And they set off from Nazareth to find Jesus in one of the villages along the Sea of Galilee.

In the meantime, Jesus and his disciples were busier than ever. It seems everywhere they went the crowds followed. On this day they were at their home beside the Sea of Galilee and so many people were coming in and out of the house and there were so many people to talk to and pray for and lay hands upon and teach that they didn’t even have time for a meal.

Just when one of the apostles thought it might be time to send the people away that they might have some quiet and time to eat, a man approached Jesus and said, “Jesus, this man cannot see and he cannot speak. Is there anything you can do for him?”

Jesus looked upon the man and immediately knew what the problem was. His blindness and his muteness was not because of a physical problem but because of a spiritual problem. Jesus thought on the man and his problems. Then he thought on his family and how this man was a picture of his family – blind and unable to speak the truth of God. Then he thought on his nation, the people of God – what a fitting picture of the entire nation, blind to the things of God and unable to speak the truth of God.

He looked around the room, many Pharisees were there watching Jesus closely. Jesus knew what he must do but also knew the price he would probably have to pay for healing the man. On other occasions Jesus had healed men but because he did them on the Sabbath, the Pharisees were infuriated with him. They did not believe healing should be done on the Sabbath because healing was a work. “How silly,”

Jesus thought, “the Pharisees will lead their sheep to water or pull an animal out of a pit on the Sabbath. You can help an animal but you can’t help a man made in the image of God?”

Jesus thought on another occasion when he had forgiven a paralyzed man of his sins – the Pharisees were equally upset about that. But to prove that he had authority to forgive him, Jesus healed the man! Still they did not believe. Jesus then thought of the woman who had anointed his feet with her tears and dried his feet with her hair. His heart had been touched by the woman’s adoration and worship but the Pharisees were appalled that he was allowing this woman to touch him.

They just didn’t get it. They may never get it.

Jesus looked at the man that was placed before him – blind and unable to speak – and Jesus said, “You evil spirit of blindness and muteness, come out of the man!” And the spirit came out of the man and immediately he began to see and to speak. How thrilled he was that his sight was restored and that he could now talk again! This was indeed a miracle from God. But not everyone thought that!

The Pharisees sitting in the room saw the whole thing – here was proof again of the supernatural power of Jesus. There was no denying this. They saw it with their own eyes. But in an act of rebellion and defiance to God, the Pharisees, instead of giving praise to God and honoring Jesus began to mutter to one another, “This man is casting out demons by the power of Satan! He is not from God. He is from the evil one himself and is tricking us. He is trying to get us to follow him but he will lead us astray.”

Jesus was aware of what they were thinking and he said to them,

“Every kingdom that fights against itself will be destroyed. And every city or family that is divided against itself will not survive. ²⁶ So if Satan forces out his own demons, then he is fighting against himself, and his kingdom will not survive. ²⁷ You say that I use the power of Satan to force out demons. If that is true, then what power do your people use when they force out demons? So your own people will prove that you are wrong.

²⁸ But if I use the power of God’s Spirit to force out demons, and this shows that God’s kingdom has come to you.

No more forceful or clear defense could ever be spoken. Jesus was as clear as any man. Jesus was accused of being in league with Satan but if Jesus was a partner with the devil, why would he cast out demons? If he were in league with Satan, he would want to lead people into temptation and deep into the things of Satan – not deliver people from Satan. He would want to lead people into sickness and blindness and other problems, not deliver them from those problems.

The charge against Jesus was groundless and ridiculous. But there was much more Jesus had to teach them about his ministry. Jesus wasn’t just delivering people from Satan, Jesus was establishing the kingdom of God. Jesus said, “If I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you!”

Interlude

Hello everyone – this is Jonathan Williams, the creator and storyteller of Stories of the Master. It's kind of strange to think of arguments in Jesus' family – but that is exactly what happened and if you read Mark 3:20-21 you will find that some family members think Jesus has gone crazy and they have indeed gone after him to bring him home.

The Pharisees believed Jesus was a liar and in league with Satan but as we have seen in our story why would Satan cast out demons?

That doesn't leave us with many options about Jesus. If he was not a lunatic and if he was not a liar, then what was he? He was the Lord and Master of all. He was the one who brought in the kingdom of God to the world.

Have you embraced Jesus as your Lord? I hope you have and I hope you will write to us at Stories of the Master that we might help you grow in faith. Write to us at PO Box 90047 in SA TX 78209 in the U.S.

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Please check out our website – storiesofthemaster.com and you can listen to today's story again, download it or purchase a CD to share with a friend. You will also find books and studies that will help you grow in your discovery of Jesus and your relationship with him.

Jesus has cast out a demon but the Pharisees say he is doing his miracles by the power of Satan. Let's get back to our story and see what happened next.

Part 2

Jesus had cast a demon out of man who was blind and unable to speak. Now the man could see and talk! What a glory to God. But the Pharisees said that Jesus was doing this by the power of Satan and this is when Jesus said,

²⁸ But if I use the power of God's Spirit to force out demons, and this shows that God's kingdom has come to you.

What is the kingdom of God? The kingdom of God is the reign of God upon the earth. It was the hope of every devout Jewish man and woman. The people of God had seen the tyranny of the Egyptians and the Assyrians, the Babylonians and the Persians, the Greeks and the Romans, but the prophets held out the hope that one day God's kingdom would come and replace them all. The people of God would be rescued from the pagan nations of the world and His reign would extend throughout the whole earth. This, after all, was why God had created the world. God did not create the world that it might be a place of evil, injustice, and tyranny. He created the world that it might be a paradise of praise for him and a place where justice, righteousness, and peace would prevail over the nations

How the Jewish people longed for the coming of this kingdom and they looked to the words of their prophets who foretold its coming. When John the Baptist came preaching he said the kingdom was at hand. When Jesus read God's word in the synagogue in Nazareth, he read from the kingdom promises and said they were fulfilled. And now that he is casting out an evil spirit he was saying that the kingdom of God had come to the people.

And what better way to demonstrate the power of God over the power of Satan! It was the power of Satan that had led humanity astray in the first place. And since the Garden of Eden the power of Satan had exercised its power in the world and was leading humanity further astray. It was the power of Satan that was behind the evil empires of the world. What better way to show the power of the kingdom than to show authority over Satan by casting out demons!

But this is not what the people had expected or wanted. They wanted a display of power, but a display of power over Rome. They wanted a Messiah who would unite the forces of God's people, arm them with swords, and lead them into battle against Rome.

But Jesus had to teach them that while Rome was pagan and opposed to God, Rome was not the primary enemy – Satan was. Jesus wanted to save Rome but in order to save Rome he had to defeat the power behind Rome and there was another reality that his people had to face – Satan was not only in control of Rome, Satan had infiltrated and was exercising his power over the people of God.

It was not Romans that Jesus was casting demons out of – it was Jewish people. It was not Romans who had a spirit of deafness and blindness and muteness that we read about, but the people of God who had fallen to the power of Satan and Jesus was now going throughout the land rescuing his people from their primary enemy – Satan.

Jesus continued speaking to the people.

²⁹Whoever wants to enter a strong man's house and steal his things must first tie him up. Then they can steal the things from his house. ³⁰Whoever is not with me is against me. And anyone who does not work with me is working against me.

Jesus was doing just that. He had entered the strong man's house – Satan – and had tied him up. Jesus had entered into the wilderness many months earlier and had entered into combat with Satan. Satan tempted him three times but each time Jesus resisted and won the victory over Satan. When Jesus returned from the temptation, he returned in the power of the Spirit and started exercising his control over Satan and delivering people from their bondage to Satan.

Then Jesus drew a line in the sand. The people of God must realize what he was doing. They must stand with him in this great work to deliver people from the power of Satan and so he said, "Whoever is not with me is against me." Jesus wanted the people to be with him. He wanted every Jewish man and woman to unite with him in a great work to purify the people and to cleanse the land from evil. But if they would not work with him, then they would work against him. There would be no middle ground.

Jesus also wanted the people to gather with him. Jesus often used the picture of a shepherd and sheep and said that the sheep were scattered and needed a shepherd to go after them. And he wanted the leaders of the people to gather the lost sheep with him. But if they were not going to gather the sheep of Israel with him in healing, love, forgiveness, and deliverance from evil, then they would be working against him. There would be no middle ground.

The stakes were high and Jesus wanted to make sure the people understood exactly what he saying and so he continued:

³¹ “So I tell you, people can be forgiven for every sinful thing they do and for every bad thing they say against God. But anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. ³² You can even speak against the Son of Man and be forgiven. But anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven—not now or in the future.

Why was Jesus so hard on this issue? It is because the Spirit of God was at work in Jesus and was delivering people from Satan but the leaders were saying that the work of the Spirit of God was really the work of the spirit of the evil one. What an insult to the work of the Spirit of God and Jesus said there would never be forgiveness for these men who said such things. Such statements showed an extremely hard heart and that they were ripe for the judgment of God.

³³ “If you want good fruit, you must make the tree good. If your tree is not good, it will have bad fruit. A tree is known by the kind of fruit it produces. ³⁴ You snakes! You are so evil. How can you say anything good? What people say with their mouths comes from what fills their hearts. ³⁵ Those who are good have good things saved in their hearts. That’s why they say good things. But those who are evil have hearts full of evil, and that’s why they say things that are evil. ³⁶ I tell you that everyone will have to answer for all the careless things they have said. This will happen on the day of judgment. ³⁷ Your words will be used to judge you. What you have said will show whether you are right or whether you are guilty.”

There was no mistaking it. Jesus had indeed raised the stakes with the leaders of Israel. Previously he had healed people and answered their questions but now it was time to let them know exactly where he saw them. They were not the children of God. They were the children of snakes. They were a brood of vipers with poison in their hearts.

The Pharisees met Jesus’ words with a challenge of their own. If Jesus was going to use such strong language and insist on being right, then they must demand something from him. They said, “Teacher, we want to see you do a miracle as a sign from God.”

What? Hadn’t Jesus just done a miracle right in front of their eyes? Wasn’t a blind man now seeing? Wasn’t a man who couldn’t speak now talking? And how many other miracles had Jesus done? Hadn’t he healed a paralyzed man, told a man who couldn’t walk for 38 years to rise up, and even raised people from the dead? What more could he do to convince them?

And so Jesus said, “An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; ⁴⁰ for just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”

Jesus was saying that the entire generation, the entire culture had become evil, testing God and wanting signs from God rather than developing faith and spiritual insight. The entire culture had become adulterous. Rather than staying faithful with God, the entire generation was seeking other spiritual lovers – some were seeking the spiritual love from King Herod, others from the traditions of the elders, and others from revolutionary zeal against Rome, but they had forsaken their love for God and because they had forsaken this love Jesus would give them only one sign – the sign of Jonah.

Just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so would the Jesus, the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the grave and would rise again. And here we have Jesus predicting his death but also predicting his resurrection from the dead. This would be the great sign, the final proof, the ultimate proof, that he was the Messiah and that he had indeed brought in the kingdom of God.

Jesus said, “The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. ⁴² *The Queen of the South* will rise up with this generation at the judgment and will condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.

⁴³ “ Now when the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and does not find *it*. ⁴⁴ Then it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came’; and when it comes, it finds *it* unoccupied, swept, and put in order. ⁴⁵ Then it goes and takes along with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. That is the way it will also be with this evil generation.”

The man who was blind and mute was indeed a picture of the entire nation. But the nation, rather than being delivered from the power of Satan would go deeper into it if they did not listen to the words of Jesus.

⁴⁶ While He was still speaking to the crowds, behold, His mother and brothers were standing outside, seeking to speak to Him.

They had finally found Jesus. The brothers and sisters had been in Nazareth discussing about Jesus and had come to the conclusion that they must save the family honor by bring Jesus home. He had gone too far in his claims for himself and he was an embarrassment to the family. Mary did not share this thought, of course, but she had come with them.

When they arrived – they found the house full of people. They couldn’t get through to Jesus. The place was packed. Finally one of them said, “Will you tell Jesus that his mother and his brothers and sisters are here?” And when the person relayed the word to Jesus, he said,

“Who is My mother and who are My brothers?”⁴⁹ And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, “Behold My mother and My brothers!”⁵⁰ For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother.”

Ending

What a day of conflict it was for Jesus! We think the ministry of Jesus was easy and enjoyable as he went from one village to another teaching and healing. But he experienced conflict every step of the way for the things he did and the things he said. He experienced it with the religious leaders and as learn in this story, even from his own family members.

Many believed in him, but many did not. They could not understand that his kingdom was a kingdom that began in the heart and worked its way out from the heart into every part of life. People wanted a kingdom of political power only.

And so Jesus drew a line in the sand and told people they must choose sides. They must be for him or they would be against him. There was no middle ground and when his own family shows up to take him home thinking he was crazy – Jesus said that his family really was those who did the will of God.

Let me ask you this question – where do you stand with Jesus. Are you for Jesus or against him? Are you a worker with him or working against him. Do you gather with him or do you scatter? There is no middle ground and you must choose sides. My prayer is that you will choose his side and follow him.

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My name is Jonathan Williams and I hope you have been blessed today and I look forward to you joining us next week for another Story of the Master. Until then, may the Master himself richly bless you.