

Mark chapter 3

In Mark chapter 2:27 Jesus has set the stage for the action in chapter 3 by saying, "The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath."

The opposition in the form of the scribes is watching Jesus every move in order to discredit him. If they can show him to be a charlatan, they can take away his power with the crowds who follow him.

Vs. 1-6

This story is both a miracle story and a controversy story, but Mark is emphasizing the controversy.

Jesus enters the synagogue on a sabbath and sees a man with a withered hand.

The scribes are watching and Jesus knows it.

It is a violation of the law of Moses to heal the man on the sabbath.

Jesus calls the man forward but then speaks to the scribes.

Jesus has already affirmed his authority over the sabbath. This story is designed to confirm that authority with action. In fact, Jesus doesn't actually violate the sabbath laws. The man simply stretches out his hand and it is healed.

Nor is the question Jesus poses to the scribes a violation.

When doing good is a matter of saving life, it is indisputable to act even on the sabbath.

Jesus forces the issue of the sabbath law by backing the scribes in a corner where they must state the truth about sabbath law. Jesus' question is met with silence – which is evidence of a plot. Jesus has framed the question in such a way as to reveal ulterior motives at work – "to harm, to kill." Give the thrust of the question, any one who truly cares about the law will agree with Jesus. Jesus looks around with anger.

The phrase "hardness of heart" is used in the Old Testament to describe anyone who resisted the Lord. The Greek carries a sense of obstinate stupidity.

Vs. 7-12 The crowds are so persistent that Jesus has to retreat to a boat for safety.

Demons that acknowledge who Jesus is are not expressing faith but rather fear.

Vs. 13-19

The shift in the narrative from the sea to the mountains signals a shift in the story.

Mountains in the Bible have significance as places of prayer and divine revelation.

On the mountain Jesus appoints – ordains the 12 disciples, giving them authority to preach and to cast out demons.

Vs. 20-30 Jesus is charged with demonic possession.

In this section Mark places one narrative inside another. His family comes to take Jesus away. But that narrative pauses while Jesus and the scribes spar over who Jesus is.

Essentially the scribes are inverting the reality of who Jesus is, declaring that he incarnates Satan rather than God.

Jesus pronounces the potential punishment for such a reversal of the truth.

Mark then returns to the family of Jesus and his response. Which is often understood to mean that Jesus includes his family in the greater circle of believers – not that he rejects them or his relationship to him.