False Accusations – Rev P Archbald

Is 49:24-26

Mark 3:20-30

Let us pray

Heavenly Father, would You enable us by the work of Your spirit to understand this part of Your word to which we give attention this morning, and Father, we pray that we would not only understand it but also respond to it to do sincerely from the heart in a way that gives glory to You. We pray this in Jesus name, AMEN.

Covenant people of God, the escalation of the hostilities against the Lord Jesus continues. We might have thought from what we saw last time that decision that the leaders had made that the Lord Jesus needed to be destroyed, you might have thought that was the low point. But, no, it is true that the Jewish leaders now had this fixed goal but now, they needed to find worse reasons to try and justify that goal. Nor is it only the leaders who show signs of hostility. Mark tells us that those who were close to the Lord also joined the fray. In looking at these false accusations from both those that were close to the Lord, and also from who were certainly not close, the leaders of the Jews, in looking at these false accusations that they bring against the Lord Jesus, we really find the same range of false accusations that people bring against Him today. It’s really not that different, there is really not that much new under the sun as far as that is concerned. And so by looking at these accusations and how the Lord answered them, by looking at that it can help us to prepare how to give a good account of the faith to those who are going to be bringing rather similar accusations today. As well as helping us also not to be too dismayed by the reaction of those around us even sometimes from those who are close to us.

Three points as we look at this, firstly two false charges; secondly, two true answers and thirdly, one serious warning.

In the first place it is Mark alone who records the fact that some of those who were close to the Lord Jesus actually tried in a way to act against Him. And they did that based on a false opinion of Him, and they came with what amounted to a charge against Him. Though perhaps from their own point of view they thought they were doing so for His own best interests. The situation was that the Lord Jesus was back in Capernaum at His home, presumably the same home that’s referred to earlier in Chap. 2:1. And once again, now that His reputation was growing, large crowds were gathering around His home and the people were pressing upon Him, calling out for His attention for healing and whatever else they wanted, and they were doing that to such an extent that the Lord Jesus and His disciples could not sit down in peace to enjoy a meal, even their meal times were interrupted. And then we read in verse 21 that His own people heard of this. Literally it reads ‘the ones from Him’, the ones who were from Him heard about this pressing of the crowds and his involvement with the crowds and the interruptions to His life. This expression ‘his own people’, as it is translated here, in the Greek language normally refers to close relatives. Though there are those who argue that it is just close friends, but most likely it’s close relatives. And given what we read a little later on in verse 31ff, it seems most likely that it was Jesus’ brothers who heard of what was happening with the crowds and they came down with Jesus’ mother, Mary in tow, and the brothers were thinking to themselves, ‘we have to do something about this situation – Jesus is not looking after Himself’. So they came down to this place where He lived in Capernaum and they heard about Him not having a meal in peace, and so on. But we note that they only heard of this situation, they were not there, they were not amongst His disciples who also were having their lives disrupted by the crowds and their meal times disrupted – they were those who simply heard about this situation and came for what they saw as some kind of family intervention. They come to the conclusion that the Lord had lost His senses, that He was beside Himself. Today we might say he lost his marbles, that he was crazy, or insane. So they decided on this intervention to take custody of Him to protect Him from Himself. Though apparently they did so without success. Not surprising because God had other plans. He had His Son on a mission and that mission was going to be fulfilled.

Now the reason stated for their conclusion about Jesus is that they had heard that He was giving in to the demands of the crowd. So they obviously feared that He had become obsessive about this. That He had become very fanatical and that He had lost His grip on reality, His perspective and He was therefore in danger of losing His health and whatever sanity He had left. Behind that, perhaps, lies the fear that all of this was tied up with an obsessive Messiah complex, that anyone who claimed to be messiah as He was doing must be crazy. And maybe added to that also, the fear that the Lord was making so many enemies with these claims and He seemed oblivious to the fact that the enemies that He was making were so powerful that this was going to bring Him an awful lot of trouble – arrest and maybe death if He kept going in this way.

Such self-destruction is a sign that somebody is not in their right mind and therefore it needs intervention. This is the kind of thinking that no doubt lay behind their actions. But the basic problem here for these family members or possibly friends, was that they did not believe who Jesus was. They did not believe that He actually was the Messiah and that He was on a Mission, given to Him by His Father to teach and to heal the crowds in a way that made anonymity impossible – He could not withdraw; it was not His Father’s purpose. He could not avoid the hostilities. It was His Father’s purpose.

In John 7:5 we read that at this early stage Jesus’ brothers had not yet come to believe in Him. In essence then, they charge Him with insanity due to their own lack of faith. And that is really similar to what we find going on today. We see in the way people evaluate the Lord Jesus Christ today, we see that they alternate between being impressed at some of His moral teachings at least, not all of them, but some of His moral teachings – the golden rule and such, and yet at the same time, if you keep talking about the Lord Jesus you can draw out the fact that they are annoyed at what they see as His crazy fanaticism. They don’t stop to consider that one who is crazy or mentally unbalanced as people might put it, how could He so consistently produce the perfect and perfectly sane moral and doctrinal teachings that we find from the Lord Jesus. The same thing is often found with family, and I certainly have experienced this myself from my family who are largely unbelievers. And the way unbelieving family members often regard those who are following the Lord Jesus, they alternate between being impressed at how grounded you are as a Christian, how sane you are, how balanced you are in a crazy world, how moral and how disciplined, and at the same time thinking – you must be crazy. You must be crazy to be as fanatical as you are – to go to two services every week, I mean one service maybe occasionally – better still just Christmas and Easter, but to go to two services every week, how crazy is that. To tithe – to give up 10 per cent, or even more of your hard earned money – how crazy is that. To give even more to support an expensive Christian school, when you could be having relatively free education at a state school – how crazy is that. And when you could be having so much fun out there in the world and you sit here instead and live your disciplined Christian life – how crazy is that. That’s the way many people put it, that’s the way they think about it. And it is precisely that situation that some members of our congregation have been in, or are in, with those who are close to them in the family sense.

The Jewish leaders had far more of an axe to grind than the unbelieving family or friends of the Lord Jesus. They had begun to realise at this stage that were far too many of the crowd were actually beginning to ask the question ‘could this be the Messiah after all?’ Matt. 12:23 parallel passage tells us that. So from their point of view they needed to stop that rumour and they needed to put it down pretty quickly. So they sent in their ‘task force of legal experts’ their ‘legal swat team’, to quickly take down Jesus’ claims, those dangerous claims, that He was making. For them the charge that He was losing His marbles was far too soft. And so they came with another charge, in which they sought to explain His strange behaviour by means of the charge of possession -that He was possessed of a demon, even the prince of demons – Beelzebul. And of all the miracles that people had seen Him performing, such as casting out of demons, all of that was done by sorcery, that was done with the power of the devil and under his command, which is a very serious double charge, and one especially the charge of sorcery was a charge that they could easily use to put Him to death.

It is important to note that they didn’t actually deny that the miracles were taking place. They didn’t come with some charge that these miracles were some kind of fake, that the Lord Jesus had engineered in order to fool the people, what they say is actually indirect evidence from hostile witnesses FOR the miracles – that the miracles actually did take place.

What they tried to do instead was to give a diabolical explanation for the miracles. For those things that everybody was undeniably seeing. And this was something they spread around. We read in verse 22 that they ‘were saying this’ – the language implies that it was something they kept on doing. They kept on saying these things about Jesus in order to bring a counter, something to oppose His messianic claims and actions. Ironically then, these false accusations actually point to the truth. They point to the truth that Jesus knew full well that He actually was and is the Messiah. They point to the fact that He dedicated Himself to teaching and demonstrating that God’s kingdom really had broken in, and that He was willing to do that even at great cost to Himself. And they point to the fact that no one could prove that these demonstrations of the Kingdom were false. But the Lord does not leave things at that level of indirect implication. He supplies answers. He give two answers to the Pharisees. Answers that also supply a correction to those who were close to Him who decided that He had lost His senses.

Our second point – two true answers by means of two parables. Again the Lord knows the thoughts and the secret propaganda of the Scribes. He calls them to Himself and then He tells them first the brief parable of the divided Kingdom – verse 23 to 26. And He makes the point that any kingdom, principality or even house, a clan that is divided that has a lot of infighting or civil war or something of that kind – it isn’t going to be strengthened by that kind of infighting, it’s going to be weakened. And generally speaking when you talk about nations, especially if they are throwing each other against each other in civil war, those nations they don’t last very long, they can’t stand, they don’t survive – things come to an end. Things finish pretty quickly. Jesus is speaking here about the charge that He is casting out demons by Satan’s power. And His point is that He is setting free people who have been enslaved to Satan. He is liberating them from Satan’s kingdom. If Satan was behind this, then Satan would be attacking his own demons first of all, and he would be weakening his own kingdom by enabling those who were part of it to be set free from it. How is that going to help him? How is that going to strengthen his kingdom? It won’t – it will damage it and bring about its end all the faster. This accusation that the scribes have brought against Jesus doesn’t even make sense. If anyone has lost their marbles, if anyone has lost their senses - it’s the scribes and Pharisees.

The second parable follows hard on the heels of the first and that’s about a thief entering the house of a strong man to steal his belongings – verse 27. And the Lord explains that if you are a thief you can’t just waltz into someone’s house and start looting and taking his possessions, he’s not going to be able to do that if the owner of the house is still there walking freely around and he happened to be a tough guy, a muscleman – a strong man – if he is free and wandering around the thief can’t just waltz in and start taking things. He has to deal with that strong man first. He has to, in some way, neutralise him, to tie him up or whatever else. What the Lord is saying that far from working for Satan and working under the authority of Satan, and with his power, (Satan is the strong man in the parable) far from that, the Lord Jesus has already overpowered Satan. And the evidence of that is that He was now going around and freeing many people from bondage to Satan. That’s the plundering of Satan’s kingdom. He was doing this not only by casting out demons but also by healing, and especially by preaching the gospel and bringing about the forgiveness of sins, which if anything is the greatest way and the chief way that sinners are set free from Satan’s kingdom. Now of course, the greatest victory that the Lord Jesus had and the greatest plundering, and really the basis for all the other plundering of Satan’s kingdom, the greatest victory was on the cross.

But the Lord Jesus didn’t start His ministry on the cross. It was already started well before that. The Kingdom of God had already begun breaking into the world even before the Lord Jesus achieved the greatest victory on the cross. He began opposing Satan, and the kingdom of God began opposing Satan from the moment Jesus, in that new way, began His ministry. And the Messiah was able to do that because He is God and Man, and as Man, He was endowed with the Holy Spirit for precisely this purpose that He could do His Messianic work and break into and overpower Satan and his kingdom. This is what happened in Mark 1:10 at the Lord’s baptism when He was filled in His human nature with the Holy Spirit, and what does He do straight away? He goes out into the wilderness and He does battle with the strongman. And He is victorious in that battle. And that is a foretaste of the other battles and the great one on the cross that is to come.

Then He begins preaching the gospel and doing miracles that display the nature of that kingdom that’s already breaking in. Healing people – freeing them from possession. More victories. More taking of prey from the strongman. And this is exactly what we read would happen in Is. 49 which foretold of these very things. That those who wait hopefully for the Lord will not be put to shame. ‘The prey of the tyrant will be rescued’ Isaiah foretold. Because God Himself was the One who would contend with the one who contends against His people. Not just Babylonians and Assyrians and such human armies in the Old Testament, but the one who contends with most power of all against us and that is Satan.

This parable then is a Messianic claim, especially in light of Isaiah 49. This is a Messianic claim that the real mighty one in Israel, the mighty one of Jacob, is the Messiah, it is the Lord Jesus Himself, who is God as well as man – the Messiah. Explaining that He is following His messianic mission, the mission that God has given Him, in the power of the Holy Spirit, and He is very very far from being insane or possessed.

This is really the explanation that we need to give to people who bring false claims against the Lord Jesus today. It is the same explanation about the same messianic work. We need to explain the need for that work, the sin, the fall, and also what God sent His Son to do. And we need to explain to those who think that we are insane. Because they look at us and say we are a bunch of crazy fanatics. We need to explain to them that following such a Messiah as this is not a half-hearted matter – it is a matter that demands your whole life, it is a matter that requires zeal for the name of the Lord. That is not fanaticism. That’s the zeal that God’s name is worth.

Those who make such accusations against the Lord, they also need to be warned. In our third and final place the Lord not only explains His actions to answer the charges, He also brings a very serious warning to those who make such charges. He introduces this warning with the expression, ‘truly I say to you’ – verse 28. Which means that this warning that He brings is absolutely true, the word ‘true’ is actually the word Amen, and this warning that He brings is said with the absolute authority of the second person of the trinity. “I say to you” which is equivalent to “God says to you”. And it is very emphatic what the Lord says about the unforgiveable sin. It is not some minor obscure point. It is a very strong emphatic declaration by God’s great true witness, the Lord Jesus Christ. That declaration about the unforgiveable sin is introduced by a promise about forgivable sins. All sins shall be forgiven the sons of men. In other words every single person who comes to God through the Lord Jesus Christ, all of your sins will be forgiven – past, present and future. Even the various blasphemies of which you and I may be guilty, blasphemy is speaking against God. Even speaking against the Lord Jesus. For you and I whether that has been done by simply taking the Word of God lightly – that’s blasphemy – that’s against God, against His Name. Ignoring Him – that’s blasphemy – acting against His name. Obviously the popular vocal expressions that take the Lord’s name in vain are included in that, but it is more than that. Any denial of the Lord Jesus Christ – that’s blasphemy. Having known the Lord Jesus Christ and then turning your back on Him – known Him in some sense as a member of the covenant community and turning away – that’s blasphemy.

Who, but God could make such a claim as this. A claim that expresses the enormous power and extent of the forgiveness and mercy of God. Enough to cover all of the sins of all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Who could say this and introduce it by saying “I say to you…” unless He were God. This is a divine declaration and it is one that ought to give comfort that this is a declaration from the living God, that there is no sin that cannot be forgiven if you turn to the Lord Jesus Christ. Even spitting in the face of Christ when you have known Him, even that blasphemy can be forgiven if later you turn to Him in repentance.

But then there is one sin that is unforgiveable. Not murder, not suicide, or any specific violation of the Ten Commandments, serious as those things are – they are not unforgiveable by definition, but blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Whatever other blasphemies men utter against God, even against the Lord Jesus Christ, Luke 12:10, that’s the parallel passage and that specifically says even blasphemy is against the Lord Jesus and even that will be forgiven. And the Lord Jesus Himself asked His Father to forgive the covenant people who had turned from the faith having known the truth and crucified Him on the cross. And He said ‘Father forgive them’ and even that was forgivable – crucifying the Son of God. But blasphemy against the Spirit never has forgiveness – it is an eternal sin, verse 29.

So what is this unforgiveable sin? Verse 30 explains that is has to do with the claim of the leaders that Jesus was possessed by an unclean spirit. So we must not think that the unforgiveable sin has nothing to do with the Lord Jesus, that is has nothing to do with the Father, it’s just something that has to do with the Holy Spirit – no, it has to do with the Triune God. And we see that in Heb. 6:5-6 which is often tied in with the passages on the unforgiveable sin, which talks about those who put the Son of God to open shame, and that also has to do with the Lord Jesus then, and we also find it tied in with 1 John 5:16-17, which talks about not praying for the one who has committed this sin leading to death. Now a common explanation for this, and I think it is a good one, is that the unforgiveable sin is rejecting, opposing or attacking the work of the Holy Spirit which is unforgiveable because it is the Holy Spirit who enables you to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus being the only one who can cover all of your sins. So if you reject the Holy Spirit when He comes to you pressing upon you the claims of the Lord Jesus Christ, if you reject him, then you do not repent and you do not believe in the Lord Jesus and all of your sins will remain unforgiven. That is the usual explanation and I believe it is a correct explanation.

The unforgiveable sin then is a final and decisive rejection of the only way that sins can be forgiven. And here these Jewish leaders who had rejected the saving power and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, but when it came to hearing the preaching of the Lord Jesus Christ, that preaching that came with power and with the power of the Holy Spirit, and instead of listening to any promptings that the Holy Spirit might have given them to repent and believe in Him, they not only ridiculed Christ and condemned Him, but they even said that this wasn’t the Holy Spirit that was speaking, this was an evil spirit. And you don’t get much further away than blaspheming against the Triune God than to say all of that and to keep on saying it. Because that is what they did – we read in verses 30 and 22, this is what they were saying. It was an ongoing, repeated, fixed habit of rejection of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

They were therefore in grave danger of committing that sin of which the Lord Jesus warned. If indeed some had not already passed the point of no return.

It is of course very difficult for us to tell when someone has reached that point. In a way, I wish I could tell you how to detect that – how can you tell 100% for sure in every case with everyone you know, whether they have committed the unforgiveable sin or not – I am not able to tell you that. It is a difficult matter for us – God knows – but it is extremely hard for us to know when to stop praying for someone. That is a difficult question. But one thing that we can know and do for sure - and that is we can warn. We can warn people in this position. That any sin at all can be forgiven in the Lord Jesus Christ but if you do not turn to the Lord Jesus Christ, if the Holy Spirit does not work repentance and belief in your heart – then nothing in your life is forgiven. And if you keep on doing that – if you keep on rejecting the repentance and belief that the Holy Spirit brings, and you keep on rejecting the Lord Jesus in that way, if you keep doing that – then God may remove from you any opportunity to repent – He may give you over to the hardness of heart that you crave. It is important to warn those who turn from the faith that it is not up to them, and this is the way they often feel, that they can repent sometime down the track when it suits them. When they feel like it, when they get around to it – maybe on their death bed when they have done all the other things that they want to in life without God, maybe then at the last moment they can hedge their bets and turn to Him. But we must not be allowed to think like that because these things are up to God who may well withdraw all mercy and all light from those who continue to harden their heart against Him.

At the same time those who love the Lord, ought not to fret and worry that maybe in some way they have committed the unforgiveable sin without realising it. Without knowing for sure that you have. As a general rule of thumb, I would say that those who worry that they have offended God in this way are the least ones that do need to worry because if you worry that you have offended God, that is not a sign of a hard heart, it is a sign of a soft heart towards God.

Nor should we assume that those who have turned from the faith are absolutely beyond the saving power of God through Christ. That they are absolutely beyond the power of the Holy Spirit to change hearts. We read here in this passage of the enormous power of this forgiveness which is able to forgive any sin of any person who turns to the Lord Jesus. So don’t doubt the power of God to change even the hardest hearts. We shouldn’t assume that those who have left the church and been excommunicated, that they are completely and in every way beyond the reach of God. That is not the case. We should instead take comfort from this passage. Comfort in the great grace and power of the Lord Jesus Christ who has already bound the strong man – Satan. And through whom all of your sins will also be forgiven for all who turn to God through the Lord Jesus Christ. AMEN

Let us pray

Heavenly Father would you help us not to be intimidated by those who say that we are mad or who call us fanatics for taking Your Word so seriously and for realising that Your call to us means that we need to be zealous for Your name. For Father, we recognise that we are only walking in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus in our own small way. The One to Whom far worse was said and done than will ever be said and done to us. Father, as part of our zeal for Your name, help us to proclaim both the power of forgiveness that You offer through Your Son, but also to warn of the power of Your wrath for those who harden their heart against Him, if He is finally rejected. We pray that You will give us the courage to speak these things, we pray it in His name, AMEN.