

June 21, 2009
Pentecost 3

"Jesus Endured Slander for Our Salvation"

MARK 3:25-40

***S**ticks and stones may break my bones...." Now how did that go, that little playground rhyme? "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never harm me." Not true. See the little girl being beat up by other children on the playground not with sticks and stones but with words, mean words, nasty words that send her home crying. Did you ever see that happen when you were a child? Did you ever hear someone saying something bad about another person at work, or among Christians who come to worship, or even in your own family?*

If someone says something bad about you unfairly or even worse if they say something bad about your family member you know how the anger can well up inside of you and you want revenge. Ever had someone shake their fist at you for the way you drive or shake their head in disgust or even worse a nasty gesture? Instantly there welled up inside of you anger that cried out for justice and getting even, and a few angry words muttered under your breath.

Today we hear Jesus accused of being demon possessed, under the control of Beelzebub, Satan, the prince of the demons. Even more hurtful to Jesus were the members of his own family who felt a need to talk to him because they have discussed among themselves that he was out of his mind. How does Jesus handle the slander and unfair criticism? He maintains his purity and holiness. He never once reacted in sinful anger. He kept himself free from sin, spotless and pure. He lived a life free from anger and slander so he could offer you the perfect sacrifice for all those times we reacted in anger to unfair criticism and slander. He kept himself pure from slander and anger so he could put into our account his perfect life as a replacement for all those times we wanted to get even.

His family said he was out of his mind

We are told that Jesus entered a house to eat a meal with his disciples. A large crowd of people pushed their way into the house and they were not even able to eat their food. Read the first chapter of Mark and notice how often it says that large crowds of people followed Jesus. How does Jesus family react to these large crowds of people following Jesus? "When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, 'He is out of his mind.'" How sad! Jesus' own family members thought he was out of his mind, losing his marbles, going overboard.

Ever see a rocket take off from Vandenberg Air Force Base. How quickly it goes up high into the sky. So it was with Jesus' ministry that began in Galilee. It soared like a rocket. He threw out evil spirits from those who were demon possessed. He made it possible for people who never walked in their life to immediately jump up and down for joy. People crowded around Jesus to hear what he said to them about the kingdom of God. They told each other joyfully, "We never heard someone talk like this before." Jesus own family members thought it was necessary to rescue their brother from becoming another religious

nut. It is so easy to criticize something we don't understand and dismiss it as foolishness and nonsense.

In his book *Mere Christianity* C.S. Lewis presents the argument that there are only four things you can believe about Jesus. One, he is a liar who purposely made strange claims that he was God. Two he is a lunatic totally delusional who ran around claiming he was God. Three, he is a legend created by early Christians who claimed he was God. Four, believe the truth that Jesus is Lord and God from all eternity as the New Testament claims. What you dare not believe about Jesus on the basis of the clear New Testament evidence is that he is just another great moral teacher who happened to come along on the pages of history.

If you present the evidence in the Bible that Jesus is Lord and God, especially the forensic evidence of his resurrection, you will also be in danger of being called a religious nut and being out of your mind. That's what happened to the Apostle Paul. When he talked to the Roman governor Porcius Festus about Jesus' resurrection from the dead, Festus said, "Your great learning is driving you insane." When Paul preached to the intellectuals in Athens about Jesus resurrection, they called him a "seed picker" someone who enjoys picking up tidbits of knowledge and passing them around without knowing beans from buckshot about what he is saying. Talk to people about Jesus' resurrection or your hope of eternal life, or Jesus Christ as the only way back to God, and get ready for people to look at you as a religious nut just as Jesus family members did with him.

How do we handle unfair criticism? How do we not just boil over in anger when people make unfair charges such as the false claim that Christianity is responsible for most of the wars in the world? Look at how Jesus handled the unfair criticism of his family members. When told that his family was outside the house waiting for him, Jesus said, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" He then looked at the people around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother." Jesus is not putting down his family. He is holding up a more important relationship that comes when we believe in him as our Savior. I may enjoy my relationship with my brothers Charlie and Roger and my sister Karen. I look forward to spending a couple days with my father this coming week. Even more important than the bloodline of family, is the bloodline that we have together in the blood of Jesus that cleanses us from all sin.

Jesus wanted all the people who had come into that house to be close to him. He wanted that for his mother and brothers who were waiting outside to take him home and put some sense back into him. Later we discover that Jesus' brother James becomes a great leader in the early church, and we know how faithful his mother Mary was to him as he was dying on the cross. Fathers, on this Father's Day we enjoy the bloodlines that we have with our children, but even more important is the connection we have to the blood of Jesus that makes us children of our heavenly Father.

To be acceptable to our heavenly Father we need to be totally pure and clean from all sin, including the sin of saying or even thinking bad things about other people. Have you ever joined in teasing or bullying when you were a child? Have you ever enjoyed passing on bad stuff about another person or listening to someone say something bad about another person? Or what about your anger level when someone in your own family unfairly criticized another family member and you could not wait to give them a piece of your

mind? There are so many times we have failed when we have slandered others as Jesus' own family did to him, or when we burned with anger against someone who was hurting us or someone we love. Look at yourself honestly this morning. Look at how far we fall short of God's glory. You have nothing to offer God that makes you clean. Jesus handled this unfair criticism perfectly. He is the source of your forgiveness. He remained pure. He offers you his perfect life so on the day of judgment it looks as if you never sinned when it comes to saying bad things about other people, or being angry when they do it to you.

His enemies said he was demon possessed

But now let's look at the unfair criticism and slander that comes to Jesus from his enemies. The teachers of the law made this outrageous claim about Jesus: "He is possessed by Beelzebub! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons." Beelzebub means "Lord of the flies." It was a very derogatory name for Satan. They link Jesus up to the Lord of the flies.

How does Jesus handle this unfair criticism? He does not start attacking them. Instead he patiently points out to them why their criticism cannot be true. "How can Satan drive out Satan?" Satan would never drive his evil spirits from people with the kind of destructive power that Jesus displayed. Then he would be a kingdom divided against itself and a house divided against itself. What if the State of California gave all of its money to North Korea to build a missile and nuclear bombs that can strike Los Angeles and San Francisco? That would make no sense whatsoever. Why would Satan give Jesus the power to destroy himself and his evil spirits? He also compares his coming to this world to a man tying up a strong man and robbing his house. Jesus came to rob Satan of his power, to crush his head. One of my favorite chapters of the Bible is Revelation 20 where it says that Jesus will bind Satan for a thousand years. When Jesus ties up the devil and destroys him he really does a good job of it.

The love Jesus showed his enemies who slandered him goes even deeper. He warns them about the danger they are in with these words, "I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven. He is guilty of eternal sin." These religious leaders heard about Jesus' miracles of casting out evil spirits. Some had seen it happen with their own eyes. Jesus performed these miracles to provide people with the evidence he was Lord and God just as he said. The religious leaders stubbornly refused to listen to anything Jesus said, and they stubbornly resisted the overwhelming evidence Jesus was Lord and God. If people say bad things that make fun of God, or fail to see enough good about the Lord, that sin can be forgiven. The only sin that cannot be forgiven is the sin that resists the Holy Spirit's work of leading us to repentance. It is a sin that refuses the forgiveness that is freely offered to us by Jesus. If you are dying of thirst in the desert, and I leave a gallon of water with you, how foolish you would be to reject the water and say, "I will survive by swallowing my own spit." People sin against the Holy Spirit when they stubbornly refuse to accept what the Holy Spirit offers them as a free gift in Jesus.

Today we come hungry and thirsty for the forgiveness we have in Jesus. We confess we have slandered other people and have been sinfully angry when we were slandered unfairly. We rejoice in the forgiveness we have in Jesus that the Holy Spirit shows us again this morning, even when others think we are out of our mind for believing what we

believe. Amen.