

## **SERMON: Sunday – 6 June 2021 – Rev Alistair Cowper**

### **From the Inside Out (Holding Fast to Divine Rule Brings the Inner Transformation We Need)**

**Psalm 138**

**Mark 3:20-35**

There isn't much in the Gospels about Jesus' relationship with his family. But what seems to be clear about this encounter in Mark 3 is that Jesus appears to have been unsupported by his family in this incident. They even thought he was out of his mind. The Greek can be translated as they thought he was mad. To which Jesus widens the definition of who is his family to include all who seek to do the will of God.

His family didn't get him. Nor did the teachers of the Law, who accused him of being evil, in line with the prince of demons himself.

What a terrible accusation. Is this what Jesus means by the unforgivable sin of blaspheming against the Holy Spirit? That by accusing Jesus of being in league with the devil they were in turn slandering the Spirit of God as evil?

We can't say for sure about this. Commentators can't pin this one down exactly. Surely, as Jesus says in the words before, that "people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter: that that means what he says. Yet he goes on to say that "whoever blasphemes against the HS will never be forgiven".

Perhaps he simply means that such a sin would indeed be eternal until it was confessed by the sinner. For we know that God is faithful to forgive sins and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9).

But let's look at how Jesus responds to his family's lack of support and the accusations of evil by the teachers of the law.

He responds not by cowering away in a corner or disappearing, or running away from his accusers, but by speaking up for himself, confidently (his confidence rooted in God), and with the knowledge that he was already a part of a sisterhood and brotherhood joined together by faith in God.

Despite his troubles, he didn't lose heart but fixed his eyes on what was yet unseen, the future glory ahead.

As Paul put it later, in the 2nd letter to the Corinthians:

"we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal. For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (4:18-5:1).

Paul, in that chapter, helps us to see that troubles in this life are expected but that they are "a momentary affliction" which actually help prepare us for a glorious future (4:17) part of our daily renewal of our inner nature, is how he describes it (4:16).

I believe that Jesus teaches and embodies such an inner change in consciousness as he keeps his eyes God, on grace, on love.

This approach to faith understands that nothing is static. The universe unfolds, our understanding of God evolves and deepens, and our moral development evolves as well.

And often, its times of disruption that are significant doorways into what's next.

Stephanie Spellers, a leading thinker on change and growth in the church, said recently that the current challenges of church and society are a way of God "cracking open" people for greater possibility.

Are you willing to be cracked open for greater possibility?

Paul speaks of us having this treasure in jars of clay and we know that the light from within is often only seen through the cracks.

The writer Alan Roxburgh suggests that the Holy Spirit has been nudging and calling Christians "to embrace a new imagination, but the other one had to unravel for us to see it for what it was. In this sense the malaise of our churches has been the work of God." (Alan J. Roxburgh, *Joining God, Remaking Church, and Changing the World: The New Shape of the Church in Our Time* (Morehouse Publishing: 2015).

And Richard Rohr reckons that "A church that has been humbled by disruption and decline may be a less arrogant and presumptuous church. It may have fewer illusions about its own power and centrality. It may become curious. It may be less willing to ally with the empires and powers that have long defined it. It may finally admit how much it needs the true power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit. That's a church God can work with."

So, as we go on in this time of disruption for everyone, might we see these afflictions as momentary and keep our eyes focussed on God, on grace, on love, taking our lead from Jesus and our power from the same Holy Spirit who was in him and who is in us, by faith.

For it is as we hold fast to God's Divine Will day by day, moment by moment, that we will experience the inner transformation we need, our society needs and our world needs.

And as we are transfigured from the inside out, God invites us to play our unique and essential part in the coming of the glorious and eternal kingdom.