

Overcoming Opposition

Week 7: Feb 12-18 – *Matt. 8, 9, 12, 13; Mark 3-6; Luke 8, 9*

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Helpful Resources

Maps of Palestine and Jerusalem (p.47, 48), The Unpardonable Sin (p.91)

Making Sense of It All

- The Big Picture

Jesus continued His ministry in and around Galilee, with Capernaum as His headquarters. We read this week of some of Jesus' more well-known miracles, that of His calming the storm and the healing of Jairus' daughter and the hemorrhaging woman. Jesus also began to teach in parables, simple stories with a spiritual lesson (i.e., the Parable of the Sower). But the overarching theme of the week was opposition. Everywhere they turned, Jesus and His disciples faced resistance or conflict. However, while opposition can be overwhelming to us, Jesus used opposition as an opportunity to teach about and cultivate faith.

- What Is Opposition?

Opposition: The act of opposing; an attempt to check, restrain, or defeat

Oppose: To act against, to resist, to place in front of (as an obstacle)

Obstacle: Anything that stands in the way and hinders progress

Definitions from Noah Webster's 1828 *American Dictionary of the English Language*

- Examples of Opposition

1. **Religious Roadblocks** (*Mk. 3:22*): Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes hindered Jesus' ministry with false accusations and loaded questions (i.e., Jesus is demon-possessed).
2. **Family Feud** (*Mk. 3:20, 21, 31-35*): Jesus' siblings accused Him of being out of His mind and attempted to prevent Him from continuing His ministry.
3. **The Stormy Sea** (*Mk. 4:35-41*): The wind and waves on the Sea of Galilee produced turmoil, stress, and fear among the disciples.
4. **Spiritual Warfare** (*Matt. 8:28-34*): Satan and his minions opposed Jesus at every turn, captivating not just individuals but also communities.
5. **Physical Impediments** (*Mk. 5:21-43*): In every town, Jesus encountered people who were sick, lame, blind, handicapped, or dying.
6. **Negativity in Nazareth** (*Mk. 6:1-6*): Even the people in Jesus' hometown rejected Him.
7. **Sheep Among Wolves** (*Matt. 10:5-42*): When Jesus sent out His disciples, He warned them of opposition to the gospel, even the threat of physical danger.
8. **Soils and Weeds** (*Matt. 13:24-30; Mk. 4:1-9*): Even in His parables, Jesus warned of opposition. Not everyone will accept the gospel. In fact, many will resist it.

- Personal Application

Opposition has many names and comes in all shapes and sizes. Often, we refer to opposition as adversity, conflict, problems, difficulty, trials, tests, trouble, tribulations, or suffering. Opposition may be physical or spiritual, tangible or intangible, internal or external. But what does God say about these things? Let's consider a biblical view of opposition.

1. **Origin of Opposition:** What is the origin of opposition or conflict? First, we live in a broken world (*Gen. 3*). While we can see some good in it, we recognize that it is imperfect. Second, we are sinful (*Rom. 3:10, 23*), and our sin has consequences. Much of the trouble we experience is a consequence of our decisions. Third, there are rotten people who pursue evil and oppose good. Fourth, Satan is the mastermind behind the evil in the world. He and his minions are working against godly people to hinder their impact.
2. **Bad or Good?:** Our typical response to any form of opposition is negative. It is no fun to endure trials, of course. They are often painful, stressful, or hurtful. We would rather experience ease, peace, and prosperity. But adversity is often a better teacher than prosperity (*Eccl. 7:1-14*). Ease is not always good, and difficulty is not always bad.
3. **Providential Purpose** (*Rom. 5:3-5; 8:28, 29; Jas. 1:2-4, 12; 1 Pet. 1:6, 7*): Though we may not enjoy opposition or trials, God allows us to endure them for our good. They are part of the sanctification process, in which God is conforming us to be more like Christ.
4. **Obstacles or Opportunities?:** God has ordained all things for His glory and our good. Opposition provides opportunities for us to trust Him. Though we might think that obstacles stand in our way and hinder progress, the progress may be a lesson that the Lord wants us to learn. Therefore, the obstacle is an opportunity to grow in godliness.
5. **Overcoming Opposition:** Since difficulty produces good, should we not welcome it, embrace it, even pray for it? James wrote, "Consider it all joy when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance..." (*1:2-4*). While we may not enjoy opposition, we can understand that it is meant for our good. Rather than curse it, we can allow it to forge a stronger bond of faith in our God. "In this world, you will have tribulations, but take courage, for I have overcome the world" (*Jn. 16:33*).

- Difficult Doctrine — The Unpardonable Sin

In *Matthew 12:22-32* and *Mark 3:22-30*, the Jewish leaders claimed that Jesus performed miracles in the power of Satan, and Jesus said that their actions were unforgivable. What exactly is the unpardonable sin? Can we commit this sin today? For more information on this difficult doctrine, see the article entitled, "The Unpardonable Sin."

The Bottom Line

While it can be overwhelming, opposition is an opportunity to grow your faith.

Questions to Consider

1. How do you typically respond to opposition?
2. If we know the truth of trials and tribulations, why do we struggle so much with them?
3. What opposition have you experienced lately? How did God use it for good?
4. What is your understanding of the unpardonable sin?
5. A friend says, "I think I've committed the unpardonable sin." How would you counsel him?