

## Who is Jesus to You?

Mark 3:20-35

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The most important question anyone will ever be asked to answer is this one: “Who is Jesus?” Is He really God become man or is He someone else? Once we answer that question, the next question to be answered is: “What do I do with (or how do I respond to) this Jesus?”

Today we will see two groups of people grappling with this very question. They draw two different conclusions. . . both wrong. This leads to some important teaching from Jesus. The conclusions come from two very different groups: Jesus’ family and the religious leaders.

### The Familial Diagnosis

<sup>20</sup> One time Jesus entered a house, and the crowds began to gather again. Soon he and his disciples couldn’t even find time to eat. <sup>21</sup> When his family heard what was happening, they tried to take him away. “He’s out of his mind,” they said.

It is, of course, natural for a family to be concerned about other family members. When the mother and brother of Jesus heard about the crowds and that Jesus and his disciples were not able to eat, they were concerned. Their diagnosis however is pretty harsh: He’s out of His mind or we might say, “he is not thinking clearly.”

It couldn’t have been easy growing up with Jesus as your brother. It is always hard to go through school following a sibling that excelled. How much worse it would have been to follow someone who was sinless! No matter what happened in the family, Jesus was never to blame! We don’t know what kind of relationship existed in the family. The phrase “tried to take him away” is a strong Greek word that means to arrest. In other words, their backup plan was to forcibly capture him and take him away.

But why did they think he was crazy? First, we are told he wasn’t eating (perhaps they thought He was working Himself to death). Second, he was traveling with a group of “common” people, and third, he kept antagonizing the powers meaning the Jewish and Roman leaders by implying He was the long-awaited Messiah. They had watched him grow up . . . He did not seem like the Messiah to them. They may have concluded he was suffering from delusions of grandeur.

Jesus spoke about this phenomenon when he was back home in Nazareth. He said, “A prophet is without honor in his own hometown.” Some of you have probably had that experience. After you became a believer, you went back to your old friends to tell them about your faith in Christ. You may be surprised they couldn’t see past the person you once *were* to consider the possibility that you might now be something or someone different than you used to be.

This is why we read the back part of the passage:

<sup>31</sup> Then Jesus' mother and brothers came to see him. They stood outside and sent word for him to come out and talk with them. <sup>32</sup> There was a crowd sitting around Jesus, and someone said, "Your mother and your brothers are outside asking for you."

<sup>33</sup> Jesus replied, "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" <sup>34</sup> Then he looked at those around him and said, "Look, these are my mother and brothers. <sup>35</sup> Anyone who does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."

I suspect when Jesus said these words there were some who gasped. The words sound disrespectful. However, don't forget that the siblings of Jesus believed he was going crazy. They were ready to take Him away and keep him (if they could) in isolation.

Jesus is not saying family relationships are not important. He is saying, if one must choose, our relationship with God and our relationships with fellow believers are actually more important. We have an obligation to try to share our faith with family members, but we cannot and must not allow family members to keep us from faith.

Let me point out one other interesting but side issue from these verses. Let me quote R.C. Sproul,

"It is interesting that the term "brothers" here is used throughout Mark to mean siblings from the same parents, which makes a strong argument against the Roman Catholic teaching that Mary remained a virgin after Jesus' birth (Rome teaches that the term can refer to other relatives). In any case, Scripture refers numerous times to Jesus' four brothers or half-brothers, and here they accompanied their mother to speak with Jesus "against the Roman Catholic teaching that Mary remained a virgin after Jesus' birth"

The family of Jesus thought He was crazy, but the religious leaders drew a different conclusion.

## **The Conclusion of Religious Leaders**

<sup>22</sup> But the teachers of religious law who had arrived from Jerusalem said, "He's possessed by Satan, the prince of demons. That's where he gets the power to cast out demons."

In some respects, this passage is somewhat confusing because there is no reference here to Jesus casting out any demons. However, in parallel passages (the same account in the other gospels; Matthew 9:32, 12:22; Luke 11:14) these words follow Jesus healing a person demon-possessed. The gospel writers did not record all record everything Jesus did. They used source material for what they were trying to show about Jesus.

Since Jesus was going against the status quo (in other words he was going against what the religious leaders believed), they concluded He must be working for the Devil. They accused Him of being demon-possessed.

It sounds like a rather extreme conclusion, and yet, we are sometimes quick to do this even in our day. If someone has a different emphasis to their teaching, a different view of a secondary issue of belief, or if their experience is different from our experience we may hint (or even say) they are being led astray by the Devil. Rather than be open to expanding our view of God and what He is doing, we are quick to limit God and define true faith by our experience. This will not only damage our own faith, but it will also tarnish the image of the Christian community and push others away (sometimes permanently) from faith in Christ.

Jesus was not going to let these teachers of the Law get away with such an outrageous statement. Let's follow His argument.

<sup>23</sup> Jesus called them over and responded with an illustration. "How can Satan cast out Satan?" he asked. <sup>24</sup> "A kingdom divided by civil war will collapse. <sup>25</sup> Similarly, a family splintered by feuding will fall apart. <sup>26</sup> And if Satan is divided and fights against himself, how can he stand? He would never survive. <sup>27</sup> Let me illustrate this further. Who is powerful enough to enter the house of a strong man and plunder his goods? Only someone even stronger—someone who could tie him up and then plunder his house.

Jesus says three things in response to this crazy talk. First, If Satan was working through Jesus to cast out demons, Satan is actually fighting Himself. Jesus says these words which we so often attribute to Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War, "A Kingdom divided by civil war will collapse" or, from the Bible in Lincoln's day: "if a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand."

Jesus was saying if he is working by the power of Satan, the Devil is a terrible strategist. He was, in essence empowering Jesus to cast out others who were also working for Satan! It would be like one group of soldiers turning to fire on their own ranks!

Second, Jesus conceded Satan is a strong power. He says the only way you can defeat a strong and powerful being is to be more powerful than they are. Jesus says in essence, not only am I not working for Satan (because that would be foolish); the very fact that I am able to cast out demons shows I have authority over Satan and the demons.

This is such an important point to grasp. Satan and the Lord are not two EQUAL powers who are fighting for domination and victory. Satan has ZERO authority over Christ and Christ has ABSOLUTE authority over Satan. Satan can only work if God gives him permission to work. He does this for some greater purpose than we can presently see.

The third thing Jesus says is the most powerful. He describes what is commonly known as the unpardonable sin,

<sup>28</sup> "I tell you the truth, all sin and blasphemy can be forgiven, <sup>29</sup> but anyone who blasphemes the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven. This is a sin with eternal consequences."  
<sup>30</sup> He told them this because they were saying, "He's possessed by an evil spirit."

How were these men blaspheming the Holy Spirit? They were attributing the work of God as originating from the Devil. They were taking what God was doing in Christ, and calling it evil. If one closes their eyes to the work of God before and in them, there is no hope left for such people. If you turn away from the only person who can help you, you should not be surprised when it is said you will not be able to be helped. Since the work of the Holy Spirit is the only means to change a person's heart, if you reject the Spirit, you are out of options.

In John 16 Jesus describes the work of the Holy Spirit,

<sup>8</sup> And when he comes, he will convict the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment. <sup>9</sup> The world's sin is that it refuses to believe in me. (16:8-9)

The unpardonable sin today, I believe, is the persistent and final refusal to see our own sin, turn to Christ and receive the new life God offers through His grace. When someone has turned from the transforming work of God's Spirit and shut that door, there is no pardon from sin.

Kent Hughes makes a good point,

It is not the ignorant blasphemer on the street who is in danger of committing the unforgivable sin, but the man or woman in the Church who knows the Scriptures, has heard the Word held forth with accuracy, has seen something of the miraculous power of God in changed lives, and yet rejects it all, even identifying what he has seen with the power of Satan<sup>1</sup>

In other words, someone has to have enough information to reject it. A genuine believer will never commit the unpardonable sin because they have already responded positively to the work of the Holy Spirit in drawing them to Christ.

## Conclusions

Now that we have examined the passage, we ask the question: "So What?" "What are we supposed to do in light of this message?" In what ways do the opinions of Jesus's family and the religious leaders have anything to do with us? There are two very prominent applications,

**First, We Must Answer the Question: Who is Jesus to You?** In the book *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis, Lewis observed that there are only three possibilities when it comes to Christ. He is either truly the Lord, or He is a Liar (working for Satan) or a lunatic!

Let's flesh this out. Lewis says logically: the claims of Jesus were either true or false. When Jesus said, "I and the Father are One" it is either true or false. When He said, "I am the way the truth and the life, no man comes to the Father but by me." These statements are either true or false.

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<sup>1</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Mark: Jesus, Servant and Savior*, vol. 1, Preaching the Word (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1989), 93.

If His claims were false there are also two alternatives: He either knew they were false – or thought they were true, but he was mistaken. Lewis examines these further.

If Jesus knew the claims were false, it means he deliberately misrepresented Himself making Him a liar. If he was a liar, it means he was working for the Devil, making him a demon. He was also a fool, because He died for this lie. This is the conclusion the Teachers of the Law gave of Jesus.

Secondly, the claims of Jesus could have been false, but he thought they were true. In other words, He believed he was something that he was not. In other words, He was delusional. It would be like thinking you were Superman only to find out you were just a crazy man running around in tights and a cape. It would mean he was disconnected from reality. In other words, Jesus was exactly what his family thought he was – crazy.

The other alternative, the One embraced by the disciples and many in the crowd, and I believe the conclusion that is necessary if one is to be forgiven and receive eternal life is Jesus told the truth about who He was. He is the Lord over all creation; He is God who became man to give His life as a ransom for you and me. If that is the case, we are faced with a decision: we can either submit to this One who is Lord; or will we rebel against or dismiss Him. We can receive His gift of forgiveness and eternal life or we can spurn it.

I believe these are the only three choices available to us. Jesus was either the Lord, a Liar, or a Lunatic. In C. S. Lewis' oft-quoted words:

I'm trying here to prevent anyone from saying the really silly thing that people often say about Him: "I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God." That's the one thing we mustn't say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said wouldn't be a great moral teacher. He'd either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he's a poached egg—or else he'd be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But don't let us come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He hasn't left that open to us. He didn't intend to.

Each one of us must come to grips with this issue in our own lives. We have to decide who Jesus really is. You would be surprised at how many people call Jesus a great man, a superior moral teacher, one of the world's finest revolutionaries, yet they will not submit to Him as Lord and Master. They have completely discounted what Jesus claimed about Himself. Lewis is right, Jesus did not leave a 4<sup>th</sup> option open to us. His claims were so great that either He was and is God, or He was absolutely crazy, or the vilest of con-man.

It is not enough to simply conclude that Jesus was truly God become man. We have to surrender and submit to Him as God. What we decide on this issue will determine whether we spend eternity in Heaven or in Hell. It will also impact every other decision that we make in our lives.

**Second, We are challenged to keep the proper priorities in our life.** Jesus undoubtedly loved His earthly family. He loved God more. He said all those who did the will of God were those of His “real” family.

Here’s why this is important: It is commonly said today, “Family must come first.” I understand the sentiment, but such a thing should never come out of the mouth of a Christian. The Bible is clear: We are to seek **FIRST** the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. The Lord must **ALWAYS** hold the highest position in our lives. **If the family is first, then God is not.**

Practically, it means He gets first priority in our thoughts, our use of time, the decisions we make, and the way we spend our money. If we do not honor God above all (including our family), we are going down the wrong path. God’s priorities should be our priorities.

Let me add a caution. This does not mean we should spend all our time working at the church or doing ministry things to the degree that our family suffers. Our priority is the Lord, not necessarily the work of the church, or the expectations of those around us. We have responsibilities to our families. We are to teach them, love them, and encourage them in their knowledge and growth in Christ. They are our **PRIMARY** congregation. But this does not mean their lives or schedules should overthrow our worship and service to the Lord! We think it is noble to commit ourselves to family times and obligations but there are times that those commitments are actually bad for our families because they imply (and therefore we are teaching) that the things of God are less important than their extra-curricular schedule. To do so is to lead our children away from God and down a dead-end street and possibly a dead-end life.

Let me conclude with a quote from R.C. Sproul once again,

“Has anyone ever called you a religious fanatic? If you answer that question in the negative, my next question is, “Why not?” Anyone who takes his faith seriously and speaks in behalf of Christ and His kingdom will be accused of fanaticism at some point. It is interesting to me that people who excitedly follow their favorite teams and show their allegiance plainly are called “fans,” a word that usually has positive or at least neutral connotations. However, people who follow Christ and show their allegiance to Him are likely to be called “fanatics,” a word with clear negative connotations. I once read that a fanatic is someone who, having lost sight of his goal, doubles his efforts to get there. In other words, a fanatic is a person who has no idea where he is going or even why he is going there, but he is going there with all of his might. However, if that is a proper definition of a fanatic, it certainly does not fit the Christian. If the definition of a fanatic is someone who is zealous for the faith, I would be proud to be called a fanatic. [Sproul, Mark)

May God help us to see Him clearly, follow Him with the determination and priority, and be known as a fanatic for Jesus.