

Sermon Given by

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### Mark 3:20-35 - "In the family"

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Father God as we have heard your word read and as we think about it now we pray that it would be your voice we hear – we ask that you'd open our hearts and our minds to understand and to obey and we ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.

If you've been with us in previous weeks you'll know that the very basic, the very fundamental question that Mark is dealing with in these first chapters is this – who is Jesus?

If this were a TV game-show, if this was "Who wants to be a millionaire?" – I guess that makes me Chris Tarrant, then the possible answers to this question, "Who is Jesus?" would from this passage alone be this. The possible answers would be A) Mad, B) Bad or C) God on earth who came to rescue us from evil.

Now if that question came up most of us here would feel pretty confident but before we get too carried away and start counting the money we need to take a closer look at the passage to see who gets this question wrong.

There are 2 groups who get it wrong – his mother and his brothers and the religious people of the day. The 2 groups of people who on paper at least you'd think would get it right, get it wrong. His family in v21 say that he's mad – or to be precise, they say, "he's out of his mind" and the religious people in v30 say that he is bad – "He has an evil spirit." And it's left to Jesus himself to get the answer right – namely that he is God on earth come to rescue people from the power of evil.

Going to take a look at each of those answers in turn now – the 2 wrong ones and the right one. And as we do so the key thing to bear in mind is how we'd answer that question for ourselves – because it's a question with serious consequences. We're not just talking about losing or making money on a TV game-show. This is a life and death question – in fact more than that it's an eternal life and eternal death question. For a person to get this question wrong is very serious indeed.

So first then – answer A) – Jesus was mad. Look back to v20 "Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him for they said, "He is out of his mind."

Jesus is back in Nazareth, his home town and crowds flock to him and Mark records how there were so many of them that Jesus and his disciples were not even able to eat.

You see this is not polite interest, this is not people who find him mildly interesting and who will be happy to make a 2 O'clock appointment and come back and see him after lunch. These are people who are willing to stop everything they were planning on doing for Jesus and so that they could listen to Him. He is their priority.

News of this gets back to his mother and his brothers and their response is far from positive. They say, v21, that he's out of his mind.

And often when people from non-Christian homes become Christians they meet a similar response from their family. They say things like this; they say: “Darling you’re going bonkers. Your father and I we don’t mind you having a little religion on Sundays but you’re taking it far too seriously – all this going to prayer meetings and Bible studies and summer camps - I mean really; it’s a bit extreme.”

They see your new found devotion to Christ and they worry that you’ve become psychologically imbalanced.

If that’s been your experience be encouraged that it was Jesus’ experience too. His family too thought he was out of his mind. And because they don’t want their good reputation built up over many years damaged they go, v21, to take charge of him – to try to knock some sense into him. At least to tell him to pipe down a bit.

It’s not till v31 in our passage that they arrive. Can you see that v31 “Then Jesus’ mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, “Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.” “Who are my mother and my brothers?” he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.”

Do you see what’s happening here – if we think we can take charge of Jesus, if we think that we can tone him down and have a less embarrassing version of him. If we think we can follow a Jesus who will leave our reputation built up over many years in tact, then we need to repent because we’re in danger of being removed from his family.

Jesus’ family are v35 those who do God’s will; not those who try to exert their will over him. And those who do God’s will are v34 those who sit at Jesus’ feet and listen to his teaching. Not trying to take charge of him, and domesticate him but actually to accept him as he is.

Let me give a very quick example of how this may look today. Not in Mark’s gospel but in John’s gospel, Jesus says very clearly these words. He says, “I am the way, the truth and the life.” Fine so far – nothing mad about that. It’s the next bit that causes the problem – the negative implication. He says this, ‘No-one comes to the Father except through me.’

And that in today’s world is madness. It’s crazy to the world’s thinking and sadly some people who profess faith in Christ; people who see themselves as part of the family, say that to make such exclusive claims in a pluralistic world – he must be out of his mind. And so people who hear those words in John 14, they rush to take charge of him. “Oh Jesus didn’t really mean that; he’s far more reasonable than that.”

If we try to have Jesus on our own terms, if we try to tone down his words in any way, then we need to repent and start humbly to listen to him and obey what he says come what may.

At this point his mother Mary and his brothers hadn’t grasped that Jesus was God in human form come to rescue the lost. And it’s worth pointing out that this passage is a challenge to the official teaching of Roman Catholicism because it teaches that clearly Mary wasn’t a perpetual virgin, nor was she born immaculate and without sin. She is not the Co-Redemptrix with Jesus.

As many of you will know Helen and I were recently on holiday in Southern Italy. We had a great time but what made us really sad was seeing how Mary is worshipped and prayed to in that part of the world. Again and again by the roadside, in shops, in hotels, in the cliff face by the beach you’d

see little or in some cases very big shrines to Mary. It was very sad and Rome is saying to disillusioned Anglicans at the moment – come to us, come back to Mother Rome but for anyone who reads and believes their Bible, that is not an option.

So his family thought he was mad, v21, “he’s out of his mind.” It was the religious teachers of the day who thought he was bad. That’s the second option, answer B) Bad. V22, “And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, “He is possessed by Beelzebub! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons.

In recent weeks as we’ve gone through Mark’s gospel we’ve seen a growing hatred expressed towards Jesus by the religious authorities and here we see the sheer absurdity and irrationality of their unbelief. Notice they don’t deny the miracles but they see Jesus doing these amazing acts bringing relief and restoration and liberation and what do they say? They say he’s a sorcerer. Rather than going with the overwhelming evidence that he was from God, they conclude instead that he’s from Satan.

Jesus shows them the absurdity of their conclusion in v23 and following. “How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself it, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come.”

With just a little bit of thought, Jesus is saying, you’d see that your assessment of me is not just wrong it’s illogical. I’m not putting demons into people; I’m taking them out of people. I’m rescuing people from demonic control.

The religious leaders are so set against him that they’re determined to ignore the logical and discount the obvious. Why? Because if they can persuade themselves that he’s bad then they don’t need to take him seriously. They can safely ignore him. They don’t have to submit to him. They’d rather believe something absurd about him than do that.

And I guess there are still a lot of people like that around today. They may not say he’s bad but they may phrase their rejection more like this. They may say: “Jesus is a good teacher but no more.” Or they may say, “He’s an interesting historical figure but no more.” They may even say that “he’s inspiring, an inspiring character in a religious story but no more” when it is so obvious that Jesus is so much more than all those assessments. People prefer to think something absurd about him or at least something unthreatening so that they can continue rejecting him.

Maybe there’s someone here this morning who thinks like this about Jesus. You wouldn’t say he’s bad but to you he’s just a good teacher despite all the overwhelming evidence to that shows he so much more. If that is you then Jesus warns you in this passage that there are serious consequences.

V28 “I tell you the truth, all the sins of and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin.”

Jesus is speaking here about the consequences of not accepting who he is. V28 “all the sins of and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them” and he should know because he’s the one who forgives them. But, for that forgiveness to be effective in your life, in my life, we have to receive it from him. We have to ask for it. As long as a person rejects Jesus they are unforgiveable. And if you do that, if you think like that for all of your life, then says Jesus, you can never be forgiven. Every sin is

forgivable except for the sin of continued unbelief. That is the consequence of getting his identity wrong and continuing despite all the evidence to get it wrong.

Jesus is mad, Jesus is bad – they are both wrong and they both have consequences. Getting Jesus identity right is very important so what is it? Well Jesus tells us himself in this passage. He slips it in in v27. Can you see that? V27 “In fact, no-one can enter a strong man’s house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he can rob his house.”

Who is Jesus? Well in this verse Jesus tells us that he’s the burglar, the robber. He is saying in v27 that he is God on earth coming to deliver us from the power of Satan. And if you get this answer then you get freedom – freedom from the one who ensnares us and we get forgiveness and eternal life.

What Jesus is saying in v27 is that by coming, by being born a man – God has entered the strong man – Satan’s house. Jesus is saying that the people of the world are like possessions in the house of Satan because Satan does his work in the world. He promotes the evil and wickedness we read about in the papers and he keeps people blind to God.

So I remember how as a non-believer I just couldn’t see the truth about Jesus; I couldn’t see the light. It’s the work of Satan to blind people to the glory of God in Christ. Jesus says in v27 that he came to rescue people from Satan’s grip - from his influence and power. We get a glimpse of this as he casts out demons but the place where Jesus truly bound up Satan was at the Cross where he died. That is where he dealt the fatal death blow to Satan and triumphed over evil.

This poses the question for each of us as to who we are with. Are we with his mother and brothers who thought he was out of his mind. Is he mad or are we with the religious leaders in concluding that he was evil – he must have done his miracles by the power of Satan - he was bad or at least less than he claimed to be. Or do we believe he is who he claimed to be – God himself come to earth to rescue us from Satan’s grip.

C.S. Lewis famously wrote about the choice that we face in this passage. This is how he summed up our options:

“I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish 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 is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would 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 as a fool (if he’s mad), you can spit at him and kill him as a demon (if he’s bad); or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”

Lewis’s three options, the three options mentioned in our passage are the only three that make sense of a man who teaches the things that Jesus taught about himself: mad, bad, or God himself come to rescue us from Satan’s grip.

Let’s pray: Lord Jesus, we thank you that as you tell us, all sins and blasphemies will be forgiven us if we come humbly to you – to receive you, to receive your forgiveness and mercy. Thank you that you are our heroic warrior King who bravely confronted and bound up the Strong man - Satan at great

cost to yourself. Thank you Lord Jesus and we ask that for any here who may still see you as just a moral teacher or as anything less than what you claim that you would graciously open their eyes to who you truly are. In your name, Amen.

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(All scripture quoted is from the New International Version of the Bible unless otherwise stated.)