

## WHO IS THIS SERVANT, JESUS? Mark 3:20-35

I don't think that there is a name that has been more used, more debated, more hated, or more loved than the name of Jesus. Just the name Jesus can cause various emotions in people, according to their background or the different levels of exposure they've had to what the Bible teaches about Him.

When faced with what the Bible really says about who Jesus is, that He is God, the Christian writer and lay theologian C. S. Lewis popularized this argument we could call a trilemma – meaning you're forced to choose between 3 options: **Jesus is either Lord, lunatic or liar**. He can't just be a good, moral teacher or a godly man. He's not just another Ghandi or Bhudda or someone like that because He claimed to be God and made Himself equal with God and His apostles taught throughout the rest of the New Testament He is God. It teaches that He's the Creator, the Alpha and Omega who stepped into His creation by becoming a man to pay for man's sins. And because of this claim, He cannot just be a good teacher or a man *of* God because once you make the claim that you are God, that option of being a good teacher is off the table – disappears because either He really is God (He really is Lord), or He is a lunatic (who has lost His mind), or He's incredibly deceitful and lying to everyone.

Many think that the passage we are in today in Mark 3:20-35, is where this argument was really derived from. Remember, we are in some of the busiest moments of Jesus' ministry. Word has gotten around about Him and folks have come from all over to see Him (north, south, east and west). They've been exposed to Him, listening to His teaching, witnessing His power over the demonic world as He cast out demons and His power to heal diseases which was also displaying His authority to forgive sins. Folks had been exposed to Him for quite some time and as they are exposed to His identity and message, people are starting to talk and voice their opinions about who they think this Jesus is. We find out what the people "were saying".

"And He came home, and the crowd gathered again, to such an extent that they could not even eat a meal. When His own people heard of this, they went out to take custody of Him; for they were saying, "He has lost His senses."

The scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons." And He called them to Himself and began speaking to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. If Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but he is finished! But no one can enter the strong man's house and plunder his property unless he first binds the strong man, and then he will plunder his house. "Truly I say to you, all sins shall be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemes they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin" – because they were saying, "He has an unclean spirit."

"Then His mother and His brothers arrived, and standing outside they sent word to Him and called Him. A crowd was sitting around Him, and they said to Him, "Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are outside looking for You." Answering them, He said, "Who are My mother and My brothers?" Looking about at those who were still sitting around Him, He said, "Behold My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother."

When you read this passage through, you can find in it **two main perspectives from the people about who they think Jesus is**. The first group is that of “His own people” as the New American Standard Bible translates it in verse 21. “His own people” from the context, verses 31-35, clearly includes or is a reference to His mother and His brothers who came to “take custody of Him” because they think He has “lost His senses.”

**I. HIS OWN PEOPLE THINK HE HAS LOST HIS SENSES. (VV. 20-21)**

In last week’s passage, He was out ministering to the crowds in the more open spaces of the countryside around but now He’s come back to His newly adopted “home”. According to what we’ve seen already (1:29; 2:1) this “home” would have been the headquarters for His ministry in Galilee in **Capernaum**. Jesus’ original home, the place where Jesus spent most of His childhood growing up was **Nazareth**, a small town southwest of there, about a 45-mile drive today. Nazareth is probably from where His family came from to arrest Him and take Him back to because they were concerned about Him. He was so busy serving the Lord and doing the will of God that He had a hard time it says even finding time to eat a meal in peace.

And I’m sure that relatives and friends of their family not too far away in Nazareth had been voicing their opinion to His family and everyone felt some concern for Him. Part of the reason for their concern is that they don’t understand the will of God for Him as we’ll see in chapter 6 when He goes back and preaches in His hometown, it says they don’t believe in Him. Friends of the family and acquaintances look at the Jesus they knew growing up and say things like, “Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?” These would be the ones who might say things like, “*I remember when He was just knee high*” or “*I remember teaching Him in synagogue*”. They’re the ones who owned the small business down the street that sold bread or fish to Him on a regular basis. Maybe He used to come over to their house to eat or help do their chores while they were gone traveling. Who knows? They’re His own people but they don’t understand who really is yet.

I mean, to be fair, Jesus had to be a little strange growing up. He wasn’t your average kid because He didn’t sin like the rest. And His movement was starting to look like a personality cult based around a celebrity miracle worker. He was bucking the false religious system in place, people were selling their possessions to follow Him, the crowds have pressed in around Him so much that they can’t even eat a proper meal. There’s never been anything like it.

So I think it’s fair to say that it had to appear that Jesus lost His senses to those closest around Him with everything that was going on. Like Chuck Swindoll said, we tend to be more impressed with those we know little or nothing about and least impressed with those we know a lot about. It’s hard for us to see the greatness in people we know best.<sup>1</sup> And this is why after preaching in His hometown Jesus said, “A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and among his own relatives and in his own household” (Mk. 6:1-6). It was harder for those who were close to embrace Jesus as God because they were so close to Him. And that’s the same story for many servants following in His shoes today. You may get saved and God transforms your life and He calls you to a certain ministry where you may receive much honor, but when you go back to your hometown, your old friends and family don’t understand it. They think you’re wasting your life or horsing around. There’s a principle here for servants:

❖ **Servants of the Lord are often misunderstood as taking their faith too far.**

We'll come back to the family at the end of the passage but **the second group people mentioned in the middle of the passage is those critical Pharisees and scribes again.** These are the legalistic religious teachers who have put the people under a terribly burdensome system. God gave Moses the Law to give to Israel and these guys were supposed to be teachers of the Law but they came up with so many more man-made laws to add to it that they weren't practicing the real Law anymore. It wasn't Judaism, it was Pharisaical Judaism. And it wasn't God's written Law anymore, it was their own made up Oral Law – a whole 'nother system in place and Jesus wasn't going to have any part of and that they refused to give up even when Jesus exposed their system as false.

To them, the lunatic option wouldn't have gone over well because He kept outsmarting them. Any questions they asked Him, He would turn right around on them and show them their error according to Scripture. So the only options they had left were either to acknowledge that yeah, He is the Lord or, He's a liar. And they didn't want to admit that He was the Lord because again, that would mean they'd have to give up their entire religious system so the only option left was that He's liar.

## II. **THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS THINK HE'S A LIAR. (VV. 22-30)**

But this just put them in another dilemma because no one could deny the miraculous and supernatural works He was doing. If He wasn't Lord, they had to explain how He was doing the miracles that were such a key element in His ministry and their answer was that He's doing it by Satanic power. They "were saying, 'He is possessed by Beelzebul,' and 'He casts out demons by the ruler of demons.'" And Beelzebul was a pagan Philistinian god, primarily worshipped in a town called Ekron, located straight west a ways of Jerusalem and the name means "the lord of the house". However, sometimes you'll also see it translates Beelzebub. This is because the rabbis used to poke fun at various pagan gods. They called him Beelzebub – "the lord of the flies" – like saying "the lord of the dung".<sup>ii</sup> But to the scribes, Beelzebul became synonymous with Satan<sup>iii</sup> and it was their conclusion that this is where He got His power.

Their claim is ridiculous of course, because if Satan is in the business of deceiving people, especially in places of worship like synagogues where Jesus often preached, why would Satan want to expose himself? He likes *not* to be exposed, but to pose as angel of light. He's a deceiver. That's what he does. He's the father of lies whose entire goal is to deceive people without them knowing it. Everywhere Jesus went, including synagogues, demons were exposed for who they were and they kept crying out that He is the Son of God. And that's one thing Satan doesn't want people to understand – that Jesus is the Son of God. So based on the evidence, their claim is illogical. To refute their illogical claims, Jesus replies with a couple of "if" statements.

### 1. **Kingdoms and houses image.**

"If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. If Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but he is finished!" Jesus picks up on their "lord of the house" name calling and says their accusation can't be true because it would mean that there is a division in Satan's kingdom or Satan's house. To Jesus, who understands the spiritual world better than anyone, this was an impossibility. According to the Jewish historian Arnold Fruchtenbaum, these religious leaders themselves had long recognized that exorcism was a gift of God so it was inconsistent with their own theological beliefs. It just doesn't make any sense.

## 2. **The Strong Man image.**

“But no one can enter the strong man’s house and plunder his property unless he first binds the strong man, and then he will plunder his house.” Jesus’ point here is that He is stronger than Satan and his entire house of demons. Jesus is the Strong One who is plundering Satan’s house. He is not serving Satan, nor empowered by Satan, but has power over him. This is not sorcery. This is God judging Satan and his kingdom of darkness. And if by the Spirit of God He is casting out demons like Matthew 12:28 says, then they should have recognized that the kingdom of God had come upon them and He’s not a lunatic or liar, He’s Lord.

### ❖ **Jesus is Lord.**

In fact, Jesus says look, if you believe in Me, you can have all your sins forgiven. “Truly I say to you, all sins shall be forgiven the sons of men and whatever blasphemies they utter.” “Truly” meaning you can this as a fact, as a trustworthy, declarative statement... all your sins can be forgiven... no matter what you’ve done or how many times you’ve done it...even blasphemy against God – it can be forgiven. What a statement of grace! And for everyone who has believed on Christ as their Savior, that’s exactly the case – they have been forgiven of all their sins.

But since these Pharisees didn’t admit He was their Messiah and were continually saying that Jesus was possessed by an unclean spirit, Jesus says they were guilty of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. And you know if you read the commentaries and articles on what this sin is, sometimes referred to as the unpardonable sin, you can end up with a dozen different interpretations of it. So I just want to try and keep it simple.

First thing to keep it mind is that this is in a **unique situation** for unique generation where Jesus is present on the earth and working and they’re attributing His work to Satan. It’s a situation that isn’t replicated today. The second thing is that if there is anything like it today, it’s not something like I’ve cussed or used Jesus name in an irreverent way – this is **dealing with unbelief** after having been fully exposed to who Jesus is. And the blasphemy that comes out of the mouth and reflects the attitude of the heart is that Jesus is not Lord. Paul said those who are saved are those who confess Jesus is Lord, right? These men had tasted of the heavenly gift, maybe even experienced healing by Jesus, they’ve heard the word of God preached to them and have been fully exposed to who Jesus is but would let it move them, they kept suppressing it and actually went another step further to claim it was Satanic. In fact, if you remember, these men, Stephen said in Acts, were always resisting the Holy Spirit and that was obvious by the way they covered their ears with their hands while he was preaching and rushed at him to kill him.

The reality is that everyone today can have their sins forgiven but to those who don’t believe they won’t have their sins forgiven and will suffer for it eternally in hell. And that’s Jesus’ warning to them. Making a decision about who Jesus is, is not something to take lightly. Your eternal destiny rests on it.

Now in verse 31 the scene shifts back to His own people and specifically to Jesus’ mother and brothers who have come to take Him into custody.

### **III. HIS MOTHER AND BROTHERS COME TO TAKE HIM AWAY. (VV. 31-35)**

They have arrived and they are standing outside of His home because the place is so packed they can't even get in. A crowd is sitting around Him so they send word. It gets passed on to Him through the crowd that they're here and looking for Him. And His response is somewhat surprising. He says, "Who are My mother and My brothers?" Looking about at those who were sitting around Him, He said, "For whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother." When Jesus says this, He isn't being anti-family (natural family). The entire Bible is pro-nuclear family and one of the main reasons our country is in such sad shape is because the family has broken down. Jesus is just using this opportunity to make a point:

❖ **The most important family to belong to is God's eternal family.**

It is more important to do the will of God by believing in Jesus and belong to God's spiritual family than it is to belong to and obey your natural family. Sometimes God does ask us to do things that our natural family members won't agree with, and especially those members of the family who haven't experienced the new birth.

At this point, it's helpful to think about Mark's original audience again. He's writing to a bunch of persecuted and misunderstood believers in Rome and the pastoral heart of Mark is to encourage them to do the will of God no matter the cost. And for some, kind of like it is in the Middle East today in Muslim nations, the cost of following Christ meant ostracism from one's family or conflict with family members who think they've lost their minds in their faith in Christ. All of us to a certain degree who have believed in Christ and desire to follow Him will be misunderstood for our faith and will experience some sort of ostracism from some of our family members or friends or coworkers.

If you get saved and start reading the Bible and actually applying it to your life and living for the Lord, there's a good chance some of your family members will accuse you of losing your senses... they may misguidedly try to be like Jesus' family and save you from you "extremism". But what's more important in the long run? Belonging to an eternal family and doing the will of God with the hope that they may see something different in you and come to Christ as well. This means we have some hard decision to make doesn't it? How do we honor both our natural family who may happen to be unbelievers and honor the supernatural family at the same time, but first? There's no easy answers to that but one thing I will say is that *it is possible* if you walk gently and humbly with your God.

There is a major lesson in this passage for us that I hope I can get it across to you. This entire passage is about people being exposed to who Jesus is. They've been exposed to Him for quite some time, listening and watching. And people may need that time of exposure today to Jesus through God's Word. And if we're going to be wise soul-winners (Proverbs say he who is wise wins souls) I think we've got to realize that sometimes winning people to Christ takes a lot more time than we typically want it too. As I said in the introduction, no other name than Jesus has been more discussed or debated or loved or hated - but *I think the thing that should concern us the most today about where people are at in their response to who Jesus is that not a lot of people have really heard the truth about Him or been forced to think critically about what the Scriptures say about Him. They haven't had much exposure to Him and that's the reason they can come to such capricious and unreasonable conclusions about Him like He's just a good teacher.*

We're living in a mainly post-Christian culture. Just the word "God", let alone "Jesus", is becoming taboo. People think that biblical truth is hate speech. Our society has changed so much that many

if not most are growing up without any exposure to who Jesus really is. And it's our job as His ambassadors who have been given the ministry of reconciliation to show them through gentle and steady witness that Jesus is the Son of God. We all need to be apologists – defenders of the faith – ready to give an answer for the reason why we believe what we do and to do it, Peter says, with gentleness and respect. For many of us to increase in gentleness and respect and patience, it will do us a lot of good to look back at some of our own journeys to faith in Christ and realize it didn't happen to everyone overnight but over a period of time during which we examined the historical and reliable evidence of the Scriptures and exposed ourselves to what the Bible really said about Jesus.

Maybe you're one of those today who has just recently been convinced that Jesus is Lord. Praise the Lord! If that's you, let me know and I'd love to help you get even grounded in your faith. But then again, maybe you're not convinced yet and you have some questions about Jesus or the Bible. Let's meet up. There's a couple books I would recommend off the top of my head: 1) "More than a Carpenter" by Josh McDowell or 2) "Jesus on Trial" by David Limbaugh. If your hang-up is the trustworthiness of the Bible, I think you'd be better off reading Jesus on Trial. Whatever you do, make sure you don't treat your decision of who Jesus is lightly, because it's like Jesus said, your eternal destiny is dependent upon it. Study it out. Weigh the evidence. Take it seriously.

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<sup>i</sup> Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary Volume 2: Mark* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2016), 97.

<sup>ii</sup> Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Yeshua: The Life of Messiah from a Messianic Jewish Perspective: Vol. 2* (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2017), 372.

<sup>iii</sup> Sandmel, *Judaism and Christian Beginnings*, p. 443, n. 16.