

What to do with Jesus?

Mark: The Gospel of the Kingdom

Mark 3:20-35

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(Yes, let me echo that by saying we want to give the Dempseys a good Maryland welcome, because it's been a long time since I've heard a good solid South Carolina accent. For those of you who don't know, I grew up part of my life in South Carolina, which is where I was converted, and it's good to finally meet people who have heard of the town where I grew up. So it's a good thing. Also Kristie Dempsey is a children's book author. She would like to tell you more about that if you ask her, though she probably won't volunteer it. But now you've heard it from me, so you can do that.)

So this morning we turn—as we continue through the Gospel of Mark—to Mark 3:20-35. As you turn there I want to tell a brief story—although I've never done this very much—in terms of the eight years that I served as a professional waiter in several restaurants around the country prior to graduating from seminary. It was an interesting life, a very difficult life the restaurant business is. And perhaps one of the most difficult positions is that of Chef. The reason for that is if you are coming into a restaurant, much like a pastor, where there's been a long time chef, perhaps even a founding chef, and you take over. But there's nothing more interesting than watching—what we call the front of the house staff, that is, waiters and maitre d's, and so forth—relate to the new management in the kitchen. I've seen that transition several times and it's interesting to watch. And perhaps you've experienced this in several places where you've worked, perhaps. You've probably seen the transition of leadership or management, whatever the case may be. And the new person who comes in believes that they have all the answers and how things should be run. And generally it doesn't take very long—usually a few minutes—for things to start to filter around by saying: Who do they think they are. You start needling, telling jokes, mocking, making fun. . . (I never did any of that) [He is joking.] The backstabbing begins. I mean in truth, most of us as adults, we haven't really graduated beyond middle school backstabbing, in many ways. It just looks different when we become adults. And it's certainly the case in the restaurant business. I've never seen that in the church. [He is joking.] We do not often like when someone comes in and says: Well, this is how it's going to be.

This is precisely the kind of response, except a lot more malevolent, of what we read in this part of Mark's Gospel. This is one of many of the sandwich narratives that we find in the Gospel of Mark. We've heard about Jesus going around and doing his ministry, the different responses that he's getting, and then a break comes and there's this sandwich narrative. This is the first of them. And we find a very personal thing happening in this passage. And all the way asking: What are we going to do with this Jesus? Who does he think he is? And as we've been establishing throughout the Gospel of Mark, the question is for all of us: What are we going to do with this Jesus? How do we respond?

Let's look at these responses, starting with his family, on to the religious leaders, and then the response. Mark Chapter 3.

²⁰ Then he went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. ²¹ And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, “He is out of his mind.”

²² And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, “He is possessed by Beelzebul,” and “by the prince of demons he casts out the demons.” ²³ And he called them to him and said to them in parables, “How can Satan cast out Satan? ²⁴ If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵ And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. ²⁶ And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end. ²⁷ But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house.

²⁸ “Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, ²⁹ but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin” — ³⁰ for they were saying, “He has an unclean spirit.”

³¹ And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. ³² And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you.” ³³ And he answered them, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” ³⁴ And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! ³⁵ For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.”

This is the Word of God. (Thanks be to God.) Will you pray with me. Now we ask you, our heavenly Father, through the promised presence of your Holy Spirit, by the power of Christ sent forth into our hearts and those who believe—and where two or more gathered, there you are also—may you feed us by this word. May you encourage us, may you comfort us, may you correct us, may you call us. Do this by your power, and open our eyes that we might see wondrous things in your word. Help the teacher. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

You have in your outline, walking through this passage: **Bold Accusations, Bold Responses, Bold Reality. Bold Accusations, Responses, and Reality.**

Looking together at the **Bold Accusations**. There are two: one uttered by Jesus’s family and one uttered by the religious leaders. A part of discipleship and following Jesus is to embrace one reality: what is good for the master is good also for the student. If you have felt or experienced rejection, accusation, hardship from those who are closest to you, I want you to hear Jesus's word to you this morning as a word of comfort. A word of comfort. That is because Jesus is not far off from you. Because this is precisely what Jesus is experiencing in this passage.

His brothers and his family are accusing him, first, of being out of his mind. Though they may have had some degree of good intention, their accusation is that Jesus is not in his right mind. It's gone to his head. He's doing that which can only be characterized as someone who is having a mental disorder, having a psychic response or reaction to what's going on around him. Why is he doing this? Why is he saying these things? Why is he putting himself as a target for those who are the religious leaders of this nation at this time? He must be going crazy. And so a

family, trying to rush to his aid, to bring him home, in hopes to shield him, perhaps even to shield themselves. They are saying: What in the world are you doing?

Now with a little more challenge and a little more specificity and evil we hear the next accusation. And as you, if you do, read the parallels of this in the Gospels, you will note it is only after this that Jesus begins teaching in parables. This was the occasion. It was this accusation, when they say to him your deeds are the fruit of the power of Beelzebul, or Beelzebub, who was a Canaanite deity, but at this point had been recognized, and this name, as being the prince of demons. You are doing these things by the power of Satan. And so they accused him of this.

So while they are different in degree, they are same in kind. They are suggesting that what Jesus is doing is not wise or reasonable, and it is most certainly not good. They are accusing Jesus of his healings, of his teachings, that which is light, they are now calling darkness. They are now calling good evil. This is Jesus beginning to experience, telescoping for us the rejection that is going to be experienced in ever greater degrees. He's being rejected by his own leaders and he's being rejected by his own family, which includes, we later find out, even his mother was believing the same thing.

Note this. Your religious background, your family pedigree, does not get you into fellowship with Jesus. For neither religious background nor family pedigree is enough insulation from being able to turn against Jesus. We see it here boldly. And these are indeed bold accusations.

But Jesus responds. His **Responses** are three-fold. First. Your accusation is absurd on its face, verses 23-26. It's absurd on its face, because he says how could it be that I could drive out demons, but at the same time do so by the power of Satan. It is absurd. It would be a house divided against itself. He's using metaphors that they would have understood, would have been regular street language. And he's simply saying your accusation falls on its face because it is obviously absurd.

But then he goes one step further when he says the following. And at the same time he responds to the accusation, while at the same time announcing exactly what he's doing and what he's come to do. That is, he says OK, so if you don't believe that argument, he says this. This is in verse 27. "But no one can enter a strong man's house..." Now he's moving away from the idea of a house being divided against itself. Satan can't cast out Satan. He says, But if I, if one. . . "[No one] comes into a strong man's house and plunders his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house." Well, in reality, just as I'm reading this passage yet again, there's a three-fold response in this one response.

First he's saying I'm infinitely stronger. Satan is the strong man. His house is this world. Well, what are the goods? The goods are human souls, are human beings who've chosen to turn away from God. And being bound to sin and sinful nature and sin's deceit they are children of the evil one, because they are locked in their sin. They are under his power. So he's saying Satan is a strong man whose plunder is human beings who have not received me, who do not turn towards God and look to him for grace and salvation. They are under your power. Those are your goods. And he says you're the strong man, but guess what, I'm infinitely stronger—because I've come in to plunder his goods. That's an announcement. Not only that he's stronger, but what he's come to do by his work. That is, to free us from our sin, to free people

from slavery to Satan himself and to sin. He is announcing. . . By this he is announcing and inferring that he is the Lord. He is stronger. [But] indeed, Satan is strong[er].

So as an aside for just a moment. Satan does not have the attributes of God. He is not omnipresent, meaning everywhere present. He is not all powerful, meaning having all power. He is also not omniscient, he does not know all things. But he is most, indeed, strong, because he can still bind people in their sin without having those other attributes. And yet he is limited in his power. He cannot undo, overthrow, the will of God. All it takes is one little word for Jesus to say 'silence' at the demons who are professing his name and calling him by name. All it takes is one word of silence, and they are silent. All it takes is one motion, and the demons leave the possessed man. All it takes is simply the touch of his cloak, and they are healed. All it takes is Jesus to say your sins are forgiven, and our sins are separated from us as far as the east is from the west. This is the mighty arm of God, and Satan has no power to overthrow it. This is indeed a mighty, bold response.

But then one further. Also itself a bold inference that Jesus is God, because we've been here before, because Jesus has already pronounced who can be forgiven. They've already said only God can forgive, and yet Jesus in this third response gives us the forgiveness framework. Now we see this as he goes on in the passage. And he says, verse 28: "Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin." Now here we need to pause for just a moment and make sure we get this right and try to understand what he is saying.

First, this passage has been used to manipulate many into fear, that somehow it's possible to actually commit the unforgivable sin. I remember early on in my faith, and even as I've come to be a pastor I've seen this time and again. There are those who fear that—because of this verse it has been taught—that you can commit the unforgivable sin and blaspheme the Holy Spirit, and people live in fear. I've been asked: Is it possible that I could have committed the unforgivable sin, because it says here if I do, I will never be forgiven. So we must understand what is Jesus actually talking about here. As well as it's misunderstood, it almost could be taken that what Jesus is saying in verse 28, is that there will be universal forgiveness. All sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter. Unless we understand all of this comes into a context. Jesus is neither announcing universal forgiveness, therefore universal salvation, nor is he saying that somehow we can possibly accidentally commit the unforgivable sin. All of this comes as a response to those who are accusing him of being under the power of Satan himself.

How do we understand this? First, the unforgivable sin, that is, the blaspheming him of the Holy Spirit, is precisely what the scribes are doing. It is simply this. A persistent rejection of the person of Jesus Christ in his lordship; of calling his good, evil and his teaching, darkness; and refusing to acknowledge Jesus and the salvation that he brings. In other words, it is rejecting the work of Christ. That means that what is being said of the scribes here is their persistent, ongoing rejection of who Jesus is. Does that mean, however, that if one of these scribes later on—and we don't know—perhaps could have become a convert and confessed their sin—does that mean, does it mean they could be forgiven? Absolutely. What it's talking about here is if there is an ultimate rejection of who Jesus is and of his invitation to believe in him, and

accusing him of doing evil, then you will suffer the eternal consequences. It doesn't mean this is an ongoing, eternal sin. It means this is a sin that has eternal consequences. And that sin is not some secret, accidental thing or word we might say. No, it is an ongoing, persistent rejection of Jesus as Lord.

And let me bring this word of comfort. If you are in fear that perhaps you have committed this, it's very likely, then, you haven't. Because the ones who do are blind to the fact that they are doing it, because they are blinded by their own hardheartedness in their rejection of who Jesus is. Because the scribes are blind to what they are doing. They are hell-bent on believing they are right. And so it isn't an accidental sin you happen to commit on a Monday morning. No, it is a persistent rejection.

That said, it is also an invitation Jesus announces. He's saying come to me. As you come to me, your sins are forgiven. Because what marks out the boundaries, the framework of forgiveness, is not about what you have done or haven't done. It's about what and who Christ is. Because it is Jesus who announces forgiveness. Forgiveness isn't contingent on what you have done or not done. Forgiveness is contingent on who Christ is. Therefore if you are a living, breathing human being and you come to Christ, your forgiveness is sure because of Christ. Therefore forgiveness. . . forgiveness. . . Forgiveness is powerful, eternal. And God says I will remove your sin from you and make you clean. I will separate you from your sin, as far as the east is from the west. And he places it upon his Son, who takes the wrath of God because of our sin, and we receive in exchange the righteousness of Christ and the benefits of forgiveness. This is what Jesus is responding to. And again, I want to comfort you. What is being talked about here is rejection of Christ. If you are in that place, I simultaneously say to you: I know what it's like to be in that place. But I will say to you, take Jesus at His word. The invitation is yours to recognize who he is. To reject Him has eternal consequences. May God, by his grace, open your eyes to see if you had been blind to rejecting Christ. This is the forgiveness framework, coming to him.

And he looks now to this **Bold Reality**. In verse 31 his mother and his brothers are continuing to be concerned about him. They continue to reach out to him and try to bring him home and call him home. And a crowd is beginning to see this. Can you imagine how awkward that was. And they're saying hey, Jesus, your family is calling. And then Jesus states boldly the new reality because of who he is. He is outlining what is the kingdom of God and what it looks like, who belongs to the family. And what he says is, it is not my mother and my brothers. It is those who follow me, who walk in my ways, who acknowledge who I am—those are my mothers, my brothers. You—he looks to these—not only to his disciples, but it is also meant to be a much broader family, the Church of Christ. And he says all who come to me, who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. All who come to me, acknowledging who I am, you are my family. It is not based upon your past or your actions or inaction; it is not based on who your family was, even to his family. It is who are you in relationship to who Jesus is.

What he talks about in this is, he's inviting them to intimacy. Because that's precisely the way family is described here: an intimate relationship. He looks at them and he says, "Here are my mother and my brothers!" These who have no blood relationship to him, these are even called by his name, he now looks to them and says you are as good to me as my own mother, indeed, you are closer. Imagine that. Now, his brothers continue to stay in that state. His mother does not, as we learn as the Gospels go along. But that said, Jesus is inviting us into this place to

receive forgiveness and intimacy, and those who listen to him and follow him. The question for us this morning as we look at this bold reality, based on these accusations, and now Jesus's response: What do we do with Jesus?

And as I was preparing for this, I was reminded of that very famous, if you will, tri-lemma, three part idea, three part response of who Jesus is that C.S. Lewis made popular when he first spoke it in the early 1940's, and then he wrote it in *Mere Christianity*. But actually it preceded C.S. Lewis by nearly one hundred years, when a Scottish pastor, rabbi, John Duncan said: He is either a liar, or he is a lunatic, or he is Lord. Now it was Lewis who would make it very famous, but then as it was popularized, one further category was added. So the question is, because we see in this passage his family is calling him a lunatic, the scribes are calling him a liar, because what he's doing is being done so by the power of Satan himself. But there's one further that will be added to this list. Maybe there's one further category. Maybe Jesus is not a lunatic, maybe he's not a liar. Maybe those who have been writing about him are just writing about a mere legend. Maybe what we read is not trustworthy. Maybe this isn't the real Jesus. The final category is: Maybe he's Lord. Lunatic, liar, legend, or Lord.

Because I cannot perfect on it, I'll give you the words of Lewis. He says: "I'm trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that many people often say about Jesus. '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 the level of a 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 he is a madman or someone worse. Who can shut him up for a fool, who can spit at him and kill him as a demon, or you can fall at his feet and call Him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that option open to us. He did not intend to. Now it seems to me obvious that he was neither a lunatic nor a fiend, and consequently, however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that he was and is God."

This was written in *Mere Christianity*. But then later Lewis would add this. Because he was a philologist and a historian of literature, he wrote these words. He says, "Now as a literary historian, I am perfectly convinced that whatever else the Gospels are, they are not legends. I have read a great deal of legend, and I am quite clear that they are not the same sort of thing. They are not artistic enough to be legends. From an imaginative point of view they are clumsy. They don't work up to things properly. Most of the life of Jesus is totally unknown to us, as is the life of anyone else who lived at that time. And no people building up a legend would allow this to be so. Apart from bits of Platonic dialogues, there is no conversation that I know of in all of ancient literature like the 4th Gospel of John. There is nothing in even modern literature until about one hundred years ago, when the realistic novel came into existence."

He's saying of the Gospels, were they a legend, why does it include that all the closest followers of Jesus had a great deal of struggle coming to the reality that he is Lord. Paul, the largest, most prolific writer of the New Testament, came to Jesus only after he was a persecutor, only after he was struck blind. He came to him with a great deal of difficulty. The Gospels themselves contain not artistic license, they contain all kinds of superfluous details that, quite frankly, make the disciples seem foolish. A legend would not be written that way. And they're simply outside

of the dialogues of ancient literature, that is, the Platonic writing of Plato. We do not have in existence a realistic novel. Therefore, that kind of literature did not exist. And they would not have cooked it up, certainly not in this way. To paint a picture that would be false of who Jesus is. His own family, as well as many others, struggled with this bold reality. Jesus is either a crazy man, a lunatic, or he is a liar, or he is a legend, or he is who he said he is: The Lord.

The question is: What say you? What do I say? From where does salvation come? From where does redemption come? Where does sin come from? Why all the brokenness? Why all the hope in the face of the brokenness? Do we have a word written about a man who claimed to be the Son of the Living God, who came to die on our behalf, to take upon our sin, that we might have life. Wrestle with that question. But please wrestle with it. I encourage you to see him for who he is and who he claims to be. He is the Lord who calls you close, calls you a family, offers and gives you forgiveness, and rescues us. This is what it means to be in the Lord's family.

What are you going to do with Jesus? Let's pray. By your grace alone can we say and believe that Jesus Christ is Lord. By your grace and by your Spirit pour that out upon this, your church, that we would not withhold proclaiming praise for the Lord Jesus. Lord, rescue us from any blindness. Rescue us from any hardheartedness. Rescue us from the bondage of sin. For you are, indeed, the strong man—Jesus, who is the light of our salvation, who has come to set us free. Help us, O Lord, to receive you as a gift. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.