



Speaker:
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Mad for the Gospel

Series: The Gospel of Mark · 11 of 11

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Okay, we're on Mark chapter 3 and we're looking at verses 20 to 35. Today, I'd like to talk about the zeal of Jesus Christ and a little about how that zeal was often misrepresented and maligned.

We're looking today at a new angle of attack by the religious elite. It's interesting to note that these miracles of Jesus were almost always accepted as genuine. The normal tactic wasn't to deny the reality of the miracles. So even Jesus' enemies acknowledged that they were real.

This new approach was to suggest **that Jesus was doing these things in the power of Satan.**

There's also another accusation that implied Jesus was out of his mind! I want to just make three points today: firstly I want to look at Jesus' reasoned argument to show that he was of God, not an agent of Satan; secondly, I want to look at Jesus' zeal and show that it was not madness but was a Spirit-fuelled work; and thirdly I'd like to show that, as Jesus' family, believers are to expect the same treatment at the hands of this world.

Firstly then we look at Jesus' argument. And of course the accusation had been made that he was performing these miracles, especially these exorcisms—casting demons out—by the power of the prince of demons himself.

The word we come across is *Beelzebub*. It's one of a number of similar-sounding words which variously mean “the Lord of the House”, “the Lord of the Flies”, and “the Fly God”. And the Jews even slightly altered the spelling of one of these words so that it meant not “Lord of the Flies” but “Lord of Excrement”! So I think that there are a few words floating around here and I don't really want to go into that. It's not necessary, and one commentator said too much time has been spent down the years trying to get to the bottom of the various shades of meaning with all these different words like Beel-zebub, Baal-zabar, etc., so it would suffice to simply assume this is Satan that's meant. And of course, if you've read the passage, you'll see this is how it was understood—that Satan was meant.

Let's just look phrase by phrase at how Jesus tried to undermine their argument.

He begins by saying, *Well, it doesn't make any sense, does it, for Satan to be against Satan? How can Satan cast out Satan? It's just not logical.*

You might wonder why Jesus represented these exorcisms as the casting out of *Satan*. After all, when he cast out demons, we're not to think that each time he was casting out Satan personally. This is just a figure of speech. Whether you realize it or not, you use it yourself. If

there's one group, we often describe that group by the person who leads it. So, for example, we might say that "Hitler invaded Poland". But we don't believe that he ran down the street with a gun saying he was going to take over the country! He was in some office somewhere, no doubt, coordinating it. His *army* went, and so it is said that *he* invades because he was the leader.

So Jesus is using a figure of speech whereby Satan is representative of all angels who followed him. You might consider that the Bible says to beware of Satan, since he's prowling around looking for his next victim. You might think *Well if there's only one Satan, and he's got to get around millions of Christians, it's very unlikely he'll find time to have a go at me!* Of course, it means Satan and all his demons as well. They're all prowling around.

So he starts off by pointing out that it just doesn't make sense. And he goes on to say that if you consider a kingdom, some empire perhaps, and if there's infighting in that kingdom and no reconciliation, it will lead to the kingdom's downfall. You might imagine that there's some glorious world empire, and its army divides into two under two different leaders. And these armies begin this process of infighting. And they meet from time to time to fight and kill each other. But eventually there's going to be no one left! Everyone will be wiped out. A kingdom can't function like that.

This business of division leading to destruction is quite well known amongst us. I mean we hear phrases like *United we stand, divided we fall!* or "divide and conquer", so it's acknowledged that division leads to a weakness that can be exploited and can lead to the end of an entire empire.

Having looked at these large empires, Jesus then uses an example at the other extreme: right down to the individual household. And he says that if there's trouble in a house, and again no reconciliation, the family will end up fractured. It would just end up fractured. We do see, even in our own city, plenty of dysfunction within families. And these families might have fathers who are hardly ever there. They might be alcoholics. The mothers might be on drugs and be shoplifting. The kids are in trouble with the police and there's adultery, unwanted pregnancies, abortions and just this... *chaos*. And the fact that some of them live under the same roof does not make them functioning families. Unless there's some healing brought into that situation, it cannot stand as a family.

Jesus goes on to say that well, if Satan rises up against himself and is divided he cannot stand. How can Satan fight himself? Doesn't make sense. It says here in Galatians, in chapter 5, verse 15—this is a warning to Christians, but I wanted to read it—the warning is that if "ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another". You know this animosity can end up destroying people. The church needs to be a fellowship of people who love each other. That's the ideal isn't it? And it might help if you picture that verse as two wild animals going at each other. And they're biting, and each of them is taking chunks out of the other. But there's going to be nothing left of them. Both of them will collapse and die.

And so this is maybe the picture that Jesus wants us to consider. And then he goes on with this example of what sounds to me like a burglary. He gives an example where he says

someone wants to break into someone else's house and steal all their stuff. Well, that's okay, but what if there's some strong guy in the house at the time? And the burglar thinks *Well, I'm not waiting. I think I can handle it.* So if he wants to bust in the house and take all the stuff, he needs to subdue the strong guy in the house first. He might go in and clobber him over the head or something and tie him up, tie him to a chair, and then he can just take his time and pick what's valuable to him and go and load his car up and off he goes. That's the picture.

How that relates to what's gone before is that it will show how silly it is to think of Satan busting into his own house and stealing his own stuff! So Jesus is gradually just adding on these arguments to show how contrary to even basic common sense their accusation is.

Satan can't bust in and tie himself up. But there's something else for us to read from what Jesus said. Something else we're supposed to take from this. **That the breaking into the house, taking over and taking stuff is a picture of what JESUS does to Satan**, whereby Satan is the strong man who was bound.

If we take all conversions throughout history, and condense them all, and view them as a three-minute video clip, we might like to show it in this fashion. Jesus, by virtue of his sacrifice of himself and his resurrection was in effect breaking into Satan's territory, subduing him, and taking from his possessions that which he would. And what are those possessions but the souls of men and women? Because friends—as you will confess with me—we are born into this world in the household of Satan. We are in his house. We are his possessions. He is our father. BUT JESUS CHRIST DETERMINED BEFORE THE WORLD WAS THAT HE WAS GOING TO ACCOMPLISH A GREAT RESCUE, WHEREBY HE WOULD SUBDUCE SATAN AND CHOOSE FROM AMONGST THE POSSESSIONS A CERTAIN GROUP OF INDIVIDUALS, EVEN HIS ELECT PEOPLE, WHO HE WOULD BRING OUT WITH A GREAT DELIVERANCE.

Before you feel too sorry for the people that Jesus left behind, I can tell you that they're happy where they are! They are very happy, thank you. They want to *stay* in that household. They don't want deliverance. Christians have for thousands of years preached the gospel of deliverance to them and they say *No, we're happy where we are. We're not interested.*

I was reminded also as I read this of when we went through Revelation. Towards the end of the book, in the twentieth chapter, the first two verses says, "And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand, and he laid hold on the dragon that old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan, and bound him a thousand years."

One of the results of Jesus' ministry on our planet was that Satan was, as it were, tied up and subdued (but not killed). But at present I believe he is "bound" in that he is limited in what he is permitted to do.

Well what is this accusation? This accusation by the Pharisees is that the work of the Holy Spirit carried out by Jesus is actually the work of Satan! This is what these religious leaders are saying. It's called by Jesus *blasphemy* against the Holy Spirit.

Now I should take a moment to explain this word “blasphemy”, because most Christians are accustomed to thinking of blasphemy as something derogatory said about God. And that’s true. But that’s not its only meaning. Blasphemy is a much broader concept. It’s really any abusive language used against another. And it’s wrong for the Christian to use such language.

If you think back to Jude, you’ll perhaps remember there’s a little phrase that talks about Michael the Archangel. He was in a dispute with Satan. And it says he didn’t even dare to use any sort of, you know, railing accusation or tirade of abuse or anything. He just said *The Lord rebuke you*.

So what’s the significance of that? Well the word used in that verse is the same one as we meet today: “blasphemy”. That is, it means that *the very Archangel of God did not blaspheme the name of Satan*. Blasphemy against Satan might sound a bit strange, but that’s the word that’s used. It simply means that **no created being has the authority to use abusive language against another creature of God**. It is GOD ALONE who has the authority to do it.

You will see then quite clearly that Jude is making the point that we’re not allowed to use abusive language about Satan. So it was wrong of the Jews to call Satan “The Lord of Dung”. It’s wrong of these charismatic churches to set up, you know, little dummies supposedly representing Satan and go up to the front and take turns to throw things at it and slap it in the face. It’s wrong that a Christian I once knew used to write the word “Satan” on his shoe so that all day long he would be trampling on his name.

I’m laughing a bit here but, you know, it’s wrong. It says it’s wrong. It says even the Archangel himself didn’t dare to bring a railing accusation against Satan. So how much worse would it be if we did it? But if it’s wrong to blaspheme Satan, it must be a hundred times worse to use abusive language against those who are made in the *very image of God*—fellow human beings.

You know, I have had difficulty with this myself. Like most people, I get angry when I see certain things happening. For example, if I see people on the news rioting, smashing up people’s property, attacking innocent people, setting fire to things and just being generally violent, anti-social and out of control, I typically will say they’re, *Vile, scum of the earth. They need to be jailed, flogged, hanged or something*. I just get angry, you know? And I used to rip into politicians. I won’t say which ones(!) but certain politicians...I felt so angry about I would call them names when referring to them. But then I came to this realization that it was wrong.

I had no right to do that. So I try to contain myself. If I see, you know, anti-social elements who are attacking old people in their homes, committing acts of rape or animal abuse or anything, I have to try and restrain myself and realize that, for all the wickedness of that sin, *they are made in the image of God*. God tells me in his word that I have no right to rail against them—use abusive language about them.

Does it need saying that if you use abusive language against a fellow Christian that it's off the scale in terms of seriousness? So there's another thing to bear in mind. But what's more serious than all that? **Blasphemy against God himself.** That must be infinitely worse.

And this is what's going on, according to Jesus. This is what's being done by these Pharisees: slagging off the Holy Spirit. Jesus even says, *Look, you can say what you want about me. You can rip me to shreds behind my back. You can call me names to my face. But I'm warning you: if you commit this sin against the Holy Spirit, you will not be forgiven.* There's no forgiveness.

Students of the Bible call this "The unpardonable sin", and a lot has been said about it. I will mention this, which is interesting. This is an example of where the Holy Spirit is in one regard held up. Or rather, *abuse* of the Holy Spirit is held up as more serious than abuse of Jesus himself. So it sort of puts the focus temporarily on the Holy Spirit and says there's a sense in which he's more important than Jesus, or offenses against him are more serious. It also shows that the Holy Spirit is divine *and* a person.

There is a difficulty that arises when we read this that I cannot pass by. Jesus has made a statement, and we believe him. We believe everything he says is true. So we use that as our baseline. Jesus says that those who blaspheme the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.

Fact number two is that there's a guy called Paul standing in the pulpit, preaching. He knows very well he's blasphemed the Holy Spirit AND the Father AND the Son AND the angels AND God's people and a hundred other sins on top of that. **And he was forgiven of the lot of them.**

How can it be? You might reason that well, perhaps I committed all sins under the sun *except that one*, and that's how I got forgiven. Well, that seems a bit of a stretch. I'll tell you what's more of a stretch. Are we trying to suggest that out of the tens of millions of people who have been converted by God throughout history there's not *one person* who blasphemed the Holy Spirit? There must have been one who blasphemed the Holy Spirit and was then forgiven.

We're not to think of course that Jesus was wrong or was misleading us. Our understanding needs some work!

Some have said that the reason this doesn't apply to us today, and that all sins can be forgiven us, is that this was a very particular sin. It was a particular sin that could only be committed by those who have witnessed first-hand the miracles of Jesus, and even with all the evidence in front of them, they ascribed it to Satan. That was just unforgivable. And that was a sin that could only be done by those people. Nothing to do with us. And I have a lot of sympathy with that view. It's the view I held for many years.

But like I say, not only have there been people who've blasphemed the Holy Spirit throughout history and been saved. Are we saying that of all the people who were saved in the accounts in the New Testament, say the 3,000 at Pentecost, there were no scribes or Pharisees amongst them, people who at one time had blasphemed the Holy Spirit? There probably was. So we're left with this dilemma.

The first thing I would say, just to put your minds at rest, is to you who have any concern that YOU may have committed this sin. Maybe your salvation is a mockery. It's not real. It's clear that this very concern is for what honours God, and that is a sign really of a believer. I mean, do you think the world's concerned each day about whether they've blasphemed the Holy Spirit? They're not interested. If you're bothered by this it's likely because you want the glory of God. You want God to be honoured, and therefore you have nothing to worry about.

The best view is probably that *we don't know* exactly what it was Jesus was talking about! Maybe that's the best thing: just say we don't know.

The closest idea I've come across that can perhaps reflect more what Jesus was referring to is the idea of **apostasy**. In the Bible, we have described for us a situation where someone makes a Christian profession. They go on for a while, they attend church, and they *sound* like Christians. And they do some Bible reading and maybe get involved with the Beach Mission or something. And they look genuine.

And one day they decide to cast it off. They deny Jesus Christ and say that they're not Christians anymore. They're going off to do something else.

No! A genuine believer can't walk away from Jesus! You can't love this man, and be in a relationship with him, and be waiting for the day when you can see him face-to-face, and thank him every day for his great forgiveness. You can't do all that and then abandon him!

And the apostate is someone who *sustains* this confession that Jesus is not a saviour, that even if he existed, he was just one of many teachers floating around the Middle East at the time. So we're not to compare apostasy to Peter's denial of Jesus—which was awful, but it was temporary. It was very short-lived and was followed by true repentance.

The apostate is someone who turns his back permanently on God. And there comes a point with certain people that they so harden their hearts following a profession for Jesus and a subsequent departure from it that **God washes his hands of that person.** He says *That's it now. You're not coming back to me anymore.*

What does that mean? Why is that significant? **It means that there's no way back to God.** It means that if that person has some regret and thinks, *I made a mistake. I think I'll go back to God.* And for all that he will try to repent and get back into that relationship with God, **he won't be able to.** And you may think it's strange that someone who wants to repent can't. But you must remember friends, that repentance towards God and faith in Jesus is given BY God.

And if, as a judgment against the person, he withholds that Spirit of repentance, **THEY CAN SPEND ALL THEIR LIVES TRYING TO REPENT AND HE WILL NOT ALLOW IT.** He will not allow them to be heard in the courtroom of heaven ever again.

It's a terrifying thought, apostasy. And so I'm inclined to say that this position of having a sin that will never be forgiven is the sin of the apostate man or woman. For them, there's no "Calvary Part Two". It's finished for them. So I think that's what it's referring to.

I've deliberately spent the bulk of my message on the first point. I do have another couple of points, but they will be quite brief.

I said that the second point was about this other accusation; something that's implied about Jesus. So, okay: he's not doing this in the power of Satan. But maybe he's, you know, lost his mind! Some people thought he'd lost his mind. *Is he mad?*

A group of friends thought he was out of his mind. Perhaps they saw him being almost crushed on several occasions. Perhaps they saw that—like on this occasion—he couldn't even have a sit down, he wasn't eating properly, or he wasn't resting as he should have.

To be fair. Jesus did say to people not to spread what he was doing around. *Don't broadcast all these miracles.* Because he would be in crowds that were not manageable. So what did everyone do? They went round and broadcast it. They got on their phones and posted on social media and they brought in crowds from hundred miles away.

Then probably what happened is this concern filtered its way down to Jesus' family, and his mother and brothers were trying to make their way over there. Maybe to get him out of that place, take him home and give him a decent meal.

You know, it's great. Isn't it? Mary loved Jesus so much. She really loved him. And that's a good and godly thing, isn't it? As an mother she would be thinking, *Has he had a decent meal down him in the past seven days? He needs to get more rest.* She'd be talking like this, wouldn't she? Because she loved him. She's a mother!

But you know, she's already been taught this lesson before. She *knows* who he is and what his mission is. And she's been told on more than one occasion. Like, for example, when Jesus was just a child at 12, and she lost him. Too busy talking, and she lost him. She found him in the temple and said to him, "Where have you been? Me and your father have been sick with worry." And he says, "Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?"

Now if one of my kids at the age of twelve said something like that, I'd say "Who do you think you are?" But you see she should have known better. She had it revealed by God himself that this was the Saviour.

But mothers don't think, *This is the saviour of the world doing his Father's business.* They think, *He needs a good meal down him.* That's how they think! And so we see later on they're trying to reach him.

So Mary was slightly wrong in that. But, you know, Jesus *did* take care. He wasn't irresponsible. Sure, he made sacrifices. It's the sacrifices that must be made in Christian ministry. I mean, he went without food. He didn't get enough rest. He almost got crushed. He received abuse. He was maligned and lied about. *He made sacrifices.*

You might remember last week, though, he said to his disciples to go and get a boat. *Get a boat ready down at the seashore so that if this gets out of hand, I'll be able to escape down there.* And he didn't need it right then as it happens, but he used it later on as we'll see next time. (And it wasn't just to escape the crowds. He preached from the boat. So he took full advantage of the crowd being there.)

So he *did* take care. He wasn't *careless*. **But he had a purpose.** He was doing the will of God. And doing the will of God requires some sacrifices be made. So he sacrificed things in a way that we described a minute ago.

Sometimes the expression of his enthusiasm for the work would break out into something more extreme, if you like. You will remember the picture of him in the temple when he got angry. He made a whip and ejected all these money changers out of the temple. He whacked these animals on the backside and chased them out. And he knocked all the tables over. I would have liked to have seen all this! It must have been quite a scene.

And his disciples remembered something from the Old Testament: that it was prophesied of the Messiah that the *zeal of his Father's house would consume him*. And they recalled this. They thought, yeah, this is zeal. This is proper zeal for God!

But Jesus was thought of as losing his mind. Of being *mad*. And he wouldn't be the first or the last to be accused of that in God's kingdom. We might think of the Apostle Paul in the account in Acts 26. In verse 22 it says this (it's Paul speaking) "Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue on to this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: that Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead and show light unto the people and to the Gentiles.' And as he thus spoke for himself Festus said with a loud voice, 'Paul, thou art besides thyself! Much learning doth make thee mad!'"

Well Paul said, "I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak forth the words of truth and soberness." Soberness. This speech of Paul's was done in a calm and reasoned manner, and still he was called "mad".

Jesus, the same as Paul, employs his mental faculties in all that he did. He was not out of his mind. His mind was fully employed in everything. It says here—this is Jesus to his followers—in Matthew 22 and verse 37, Jesus says "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul **and with all thy mind.**" It's everything about you: your emotions, your intellect...it's everything.

Christianity is a religion like that. It's a religion of *reason*. Ours is not a religion where we try to empty our mind to allow outside influences to take over. We remain sober. We remain in control of our senses. And we believe all these supernatural things as well.

And it's not that we accept Christianity, it's not that we follow Christ, because it ticks all the boxes for what is reasonable. That's not exactly how it works. It's more the case that yes, it is reasonable, but we discover it more when we've been Christians for a while. The more we study the scriptures, we find that they accord more and more with reason. It's a fully reasonable faith that we have. It's sensible. It's logical.

It's reasonable. And Jesus, as I say, is fully in control of his mind, when he does these things, just like Paul is and just like we're to be.

My final point is about something Jesus said at the end. They were telling him his family was outside and he said, "Who is my family? My family is everyone who obeys God!" *Everyone*

who obeys God. That is, those who are ABLE to obey God THROUGH being in a relationship with Jesus Christ. It is them who are Jesus' family.

And although Jesus had, if I can say, biological connections to his mother and his brothers, there were some in this extended family who would never trust in him. And those ties would be broken at death. And here Jesus says, *I have another family which transcends all these families. It is a connection which is higher and stronger than any genetic one on this earth: **the family of God.*** And friend, if you're a believer, YOU are part of the family. You are Jesus' brothers and sisters! Part of his family.

So it should be expected that his family would be like him and would expect the same treatment as him. You might say that *we* are out of *our* minds then if Jesus was out of his mind. And if he's mad then we must be mad as well because we follow him, and we're related to him.

It's always been funny to me how the world finds Christian zeal very odd. And you don't have to be very outwardly zealous for them to think that you're mad. Why it's strange is because the people of this world might be say watching television. They might see a news item where some guy and his disabled wife who are living in poverty have just won the lottery. They've won £10m and their lives are going to be transformed. People will be pleased for them. And even if the man on the television who won this money is jumping up and down and screaming and crying, people will think that's normal behaviour. That's fine. That extreme behaviour is fine.

Other people in the world go to things like football matches. And they'll go, and if their team scores a goal they, along with thousands of other adults, will simultaneously start to jump up and down, shout, scream, cry, hug strangers, and I don't know what. And all that is acceptable! That's all normal! Christians show just the slightest degree of joy or enthusiasm and they're thought of as mad. It's bizarre, isn't it?

Not only do they think you're mad for believing in God and wanting to obey him, they find it very odd that you're not like them. They want you to come back to being normal. *Their* type of mad! Listen to what it says in 1 Peter, chapter 4. This is verses 3 and 4: "For the time past of our lives may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings and abominable idolatries. Wherein **they think it strange that you run not with them** to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you."

All the time speaking evil of you. Because they want you to be mad *like them*. They don't want you to be obsessed with God which is what all true Christian should be. It's strange.

Paul describes preaching in this way in Corinthians. He says that the secular world thinks preaching is stupid. He goes on to say that it's through the "stupidity" of preaching that God brings his elect in. So God has the last laugh! He uses the so-called foolishness of preaching to save his people. So Christians go out and preach. They preach in churches, and some on the streets, and some on videos on the internet. And people think it's stupid.

Think about WHY they thought Jesus was mad. Well, he had this enthusiasm. And as I said he made sacrifices did he not? And then he refused to conform to the ways of religious tradition.

They thought he was mad because he had his priorities the right way round—for them, the wrong way round. Jesus taught that, you know, mercy and love were more important than the performance of mere rituals. The religious tradition was, *Yeah, love and all that is fine. We do all that stuff as well. But really you need to be strict on these points here. You need to be strict on keeping these traditions.* The wrong way round.

People in the churches today do the same. They criticize people for doing something they think is slightly off and do it in a way that is unloving—which is worse!

So Jesus Christ was thought of as mad because he didn't conform. He upset everyone.

What about us? Why would people think *we're* mad? Well, they see that we don't conform to religious tradition. You might say well, we're in church, aren't we? Well, about 95% of all the churches in this world are, if I might be bold, **spiritually dead**. We could go and take a walk now in increasing circles around this area and stop at each of the churches. And we could go in the next time they have a meeting and listen to what they preach. Let's see what they've got to say. Well if you expect lots of exaltation of Christ, confronting people with sin, urging people to repent, speaking freely of realities like death, judgement and resurrection...you're going to be disappointed! Most churches preach nothing of the sort. They preached a New Age, feel good religion of respectability that has nothing to do with the scriptures.

So they don't like us for that—our separation. They think *we're* odd. They think, *Why do they make sacrifices on their time like this?* They'll say, *What, you go to a church meeting two or three times a WEEK? You could be doing something else. You what? You give MONEY to the church? If you saved that money, in a couple of years you could buy a new car! Why are you making these sacrifices?* They think *we're* odd.

The final verse I want to quote today is from 2nd Corinthians, and it's chapter 5 and verse 13. Paul says, "For whether we be beside ourselves ["mad"], it is to God; or whether we be sober, that's for your cause." Paul's acknowledging that his behaviour as a Christian is expressed both soberly and with excitement. And really that is how Christians are now. Because really believing in the scriptures and really loving Jesus *being expressed* is going to be particularly thought of as strange and mad, and people will perhaps think you have mental illness—that you've been taken up by some kind of hysteria.

Because of this, many Christians will try to avoid giving that impression. They may say that it's for the sake of the gospel. There are people in the church who will realize that there is a level of Christian activity which is acceptable in the eyes of the world. And they realize that as long as they don't go beyond that line, they can have the best of both worlds. They can be devoted to God, but still be friends with everyone. I see that a lot.

We're not to go out of our way to lose friends. Of course not. But I would say to them, if they're inclined to refrain from Christian activity because they think people will think well of

them, **they are treading on very thin ice.** They need to be concerned. **Because it just may be that their behaviour will result in Jesus not speaking up for THEM.** Can you imagine if Jesus right now stopped representing you in the throne room of God? Imagine if your all your prayers were refused by God. *Imagine if he stopped listening to you.* Imagine at the judgment Jesus Christ refusing to be your representative, your barrister. Imagine him remaining seated and saying, *Well, in your life you were ashamed of me and now I am ashamed of you.* It doesn't bear thinking about.

I'm not suggesting that people can lose their salvation. **I'm suggesting that if people want to live a life that is so respectable that they think they can keep one foot in the kingdom of God and one in the world, THEY ARE MISTAKEN, and they're showing the signs of an unbeliever.** And the risk that I've just described is real.

And so I would say friends that you should really dig deep now. Dig deep and find courage, and think more about what Jesus thinks than what the world thinks.

I'll conclude with this. It's obvious from what we're saying that there's a balance that needs to be struck. On the one hand, we don't want to copy the excesses of the charismatic movement in their wild behaviour. The other extreme we want to avoid is a religion that is devoid of the Holy Spirit. So there is a balance to be found.

If I could describe to you what the balance is, it is this: you go about those things like attending meetings and studying the scriptures together and praying with other believers and visiting the brethren. We do all those things. But a major component in the life of the Christian is that they bear testimony for Jesus Christ. That they tell others about Jesus. And you cannot tell others about Jesus unless you mention things like sin, judgment, Satan, etc. and all those are the things that will cause people to think you are losing your mind! And so you need to make a decision. Who do you care about most? I would encourage you to really, as much as it lies within you, find ways to bear witness for Jesus Christ.

After all, we're part of his family. And when all this is gone, all that will remain is that family.

All those friends, whose opinions you thought so much of—gone. We'll be left with a new world. With a new family to live with forever. What a blessed hope that is.

So I would encourage you, friends, to be bold, and not be worried about your zeal being thought of as a temporary madness. Because none other than Jesus himself suffered the same allegation. We thank him for that boldness he had.

The Lord bless you.

Amen.