

“Three Responses to Jesus”

Mark 3:20-35

I invite you to turn with me in your Bibles this morning to the third chapter of Mark, where we will pick back up in verse 20. There is no greater blessing in life than to know that your sins are forgiven by God. In Psalm 32:1, David wrote, “Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity.” The greatest freedom in life is knowing that there is nothing between you and God that is hindering or preventing a relationship with Him. The barrier is removed, guilt has been atoned for, and access to Him has been granted. What a joy in knowing, as Paul says it in Romans 5:1, “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” And then Romans 8:1, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

Now, I want us to deal with a subject this morning that may in fact be one of the most difficult subjects in all the Bible. It comes up here in our text in what may very well be some of the most difficult words that Jesus ever spoke. And it is the subject of the unpardonable, unforgivable sin. Did you know that there is one sin that cannot be forgiven? What is this sin, and what makes it so serious? Is it something that a Christian can commit? Well, those are some questions I want to answer for you as we look together at this passage. And it is this very thing that Jesus will address. (Read)

The single most important thing in your life is how you have responded to the person of Jesus Christ. If you are young, it is more important than who you will choose for a spouse. It is far more important than where you will go to college, or what you will decide to do for a living. If you’re middle age, this is so much more important than how much money you are making, more important than your

hobbies, and more important than your politics. Those of you who are older, this is more important than having family close. It is more important than retirement benefits, more important than our physical health issues. Friends, how you have responded to the person of Jesus Christ is much more important than anything else you have going on in your world. Because the reason for this is that your eternity literally hinges upon your response to Christ. He is not someone that you can ignore or ghost. And there is no neutrality. To not make a decision about Jesus is to make a decision.

In *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis famously presented what has become known as his 'trilemma' concerning the person of Jesus Christ. Not a dilemma, but a trilemma. You know what a dilemma is, for it is a difficult choice between two alternatives. A trilemma is a difficult choice between three options. C.S. Lewis said that when we weigh the evidence, there are only three options when it comes to the person of Jesus. He is either a liar, a lunatic, or He is Lord. He said:

C.S. Lewis — *"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...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 for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but lets not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to...When Jesus claimed to be God, there were only three options:*

either He is God, or He is a lunatic, or He is a liar pulling off a very, very grand scheme of deception.”

He is a liar, a lunatic, or Lord. There are no other options. Good Teacher isn't an option because He claimed deity for Himself. If He were not God, He would not be good. Or at least He would have been under a delusion, which means He would be a lunatic. The only alternative is that Jesus is indeed who He claimed to be—God in human flesh, Christ the Lord! And I can't help but wonder whether or not C.S. Lewis was looking at this passage when he said that. In this text, all three categories of explanation are raised as to the person of Jesus Christ. Is He out of His mind? That is the question raised by His family. Is He a liar inspired by Satan? That is the question raised by His opponents. Or is He indeed the Lord? That is the question raised by His followers. But you had better be careful what conclusion you come to, because eternity is hanging in the balance.

1—The ASSUMPTION of His family (3:20-21)

“Then He went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. And when His family heard it, they went out to seize Him, for they were saying, ‘He is out of His mind.’”

As Jesus is ministering to crowds and commissioning His disciples, Mark says that His family and those closest to Him came to seize Him, for they were saying, “He is out of His mind.” In other words, they thought that He had lost it. They could not understand why Jesus was giving Himself to the crowds like He had been, so much so that He could barely eat. It reflects their misunderstanding of who He is and what He had come to do. As the Savior of the world, He came to seek and save the lost. He was certain in His purpose, but His family members were not.

In addition to His mother Mary, we know that Jesus had other family. Joseph and Mary had other children, some of whose names are mentioned in the New Testament. They would be His 'half-siblings' because though Mary was His earthly mother, Joseph was not His biological father due to the virgin birth. Both prophecy and the gospel writers say that Jesus was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. But He does have these other family members, younger siblings who at this point don't believe He is the Messiah. They will later come to faith, but only after the resurrection.

But their attitude here is that of unbelief, the same attitude shown by the people of Nazareth a couple chapters later:

Mark 6:3—“Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us? And they took offense at Him.”

And so as Jesus has been preaching throughout Galilee, word about Him has spread far and wide. He's returned to Capernaum with His twelve disciples whom we read about in the previous verses. The crowd hears that He is back home, and it begins to gather again so that they could not even eat. And this is too much for His family who've also heard about it. They come from Nazareth for the purpose of seizing Him, as verse 21 says they were saying, “He is out of His mind.”

“Seize” —*means to take custody or charge; an attempt to forcibly remove Him for His own good*

They thought they were helping Him out. Have you ever been misunderstood by those closest to you? It is a painful experience. Maybe they've questioned your motives, not understood your decisions. They mean well, but miss it. I wonder

how many people have been talked out of ministry by their family who wanted to see them do something else more lucrative. How many moms and dads are far from enthusiastic when their sons and daughters sense God's call to the mission field?

William Carey, often called the father of modern missions, faced misunderstanding from fellow ministers who believed global evangelism was presumptuous. At a meeting of Baptist leaders, as a young man Carey stood up and made a passionate plea for the church to do its part in taking the gospel to the nations. And an older man who opposed him interrupted him said, "Young man, sit down. When God decides to convert the heath, He'll do it without consulting you or me." But thank the Lord that William Carey didn't let someone else's bucket of cold water dampen the fire in his heart to see the gospel taken to the nations. It was Carey who famously said, "Expect great things from God, attempt great things for God."

Misunderstanding often hurts the most when it comes from family, friends, and fellow believers rather than enemies. I mean you sort of expect opposition from enemies, but to be unfairly criticized by those who know you the best is a hard pill to swallow. And I'm not saying that we need to always dismiss those criticisms. But here in Jesus' case, it is an example of their unbelief. They question what He is doing because they've failed to recognize who He is!

And so the response of His family at this point illustrates a same response that many in our time have made. They've assumed that Jesus was this religious fanatic and nothing more. A religious figure in history, maybe even a little bit out of touch with the real world, but He is certainly not God, or is He? That's the first response. Notice the second:

2—The ACCUSATION of His opponents (3:22-30)

“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.’ And He called them to Him and said to them in parables, ‘How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end. 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. 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’—for they were saying, ‘He has an unclean spirit.’”

Jesus’ family misunderstood Him, having failed to see His true identity. But the scribes and religious leaders saw the miracles and heard His claims, and yet they rejected Him. They even go so far as to make the accusation that He did those works by the power of Satan. It is one thing to fail to see, but it is another thing to refuse to see.

Why don’t they conclude that He’s just delusional? It is because they have to explain the supernatural. Delusional men can’t work divine miracles. Insanity doesn’t explain all the supernatural miracles that He had done. You only say that if you don’t know that there’s a supernatural element. They know full well that sick people have been healed, and demon possessed people have been delivered. Jesus had shown authority over the physical and the spiritual. And so rather than bowing to Him in faith, they attribute His power to Satan and say that He is possessed by ‘Beelzebul’ the prince of demons, which is simply another name for Satan himself.

Jesus says to them in verse 23, “How can Satan cast out Satan?” That would be an absurdity. While evil manifests itself in different ways, the devil is most certainly not going around doing havoc to his own kingdom. He’s not going around exposing people with demons who were sitting in the synagogues, doing His dirty work. He wants them to be clandestine, not exposed. But every time Jesus goes into a synagogue, the demons cry out in terror and blow their cover. No, Satan is not trying to destroy himself and his enterprise. Satan is cunning and deceptive. It would be absurd to think that he would be out to dismantle his own kingdom. He is out to destroy the work of God, not his own doings.

And so Jesus tells the scribes that it would be absurd to think that Satan’s kingdom is divided against itself. Which means that the power by which He was casting out the evil spirits was divine. He says in verse 27, “No one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods unless he first binds the strong man. And only then can he plunder the house.” One stronger than the strong man is here! Power greater than that of Satan has come to set the captives of Satan free. Jesus is saying, “I’ve come to bind the strong man and plunder his house!” (see 1 John 3:8)

And so it is at this point that Jesus says what are perhaps some of the most astonishing and sobering words that He ever spoke. To express the gravity of what He is about to say, notice the statement in verse 28, “Truly, I say to you.” In other words, you need to pay very close attention to the words I’m about to speak. Give your undivided attention to what I’m about to say. The phrase occurs 13 times in Mark and 51 times in Matthew and Luke. It is used 25 times in John where the word ‘truly’ is doubled for emphasis: “Truly, truly I say to you.”

“Truly” — *the Greek word is ἀμήν (amen)*

It means that Jesus is speaking with divine authority as the Son of God. The closest parallel in the Old Testament may be the solemn declaration of the prophets, "Thus says the Lord." All of His words carry divine weight and authority, but He is about to say something of utmost seriousness.

The sin of the religious leaders of Israel was in attributing the work of the Holy Spirit to Satan. They had seen what Jesus had been doing, heard what Jesus had said, and yet they double down in their rejection of Him. Even going so far as to attribute it all to the work of the devil. Notice how the text emphasizes what they 'were saying.' It is there in verse 22, and then again in verse 30.

Blasphemy is sin of speech. And Jesus says, "Truly I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter..." This is cause for rejoicing for those who trust in Christ. All means all! However, there is one sin that is so serious and grave that the one who commits it bears the condemnation for it forever. Verse 29 says, "But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin."

Sins against the Holy Spirit are among the most serious in Scripture. Why? The Holy Spirit is the divine Person who applies God's saving work to our hearts. God the Father has appointed it, God the Son has accomplished it, and God the Holy Spirit applies it. Therefore to reject, resist, or blaspheme the Holy Spirit is to oppose the very One who brings conviction of sin, reveals Christ, and calls people to repentance and faith. The religious leaders had witnessed undeniable evidence of the Spirit's work through Jesus and were attributing that work to Satan. The scribes were not lacking evidence; they had abundant evidence. Their sin was especially serious because they knowingly opposed what God was clearly doing. Their problem was not merely ignorance but involved willful, hardened rejection of divine revelation. And that sin is unforgivable not because

God's mercy is limited, but because a person persistently rejects the Holy Spirit's testimony that is intended to lead him to seek forgiveness. As long as a person remains in that hardened condition, there is no other means of salvation available. That's what these religious scribes were doing.

And so what is blasphemy of the Holy Spirit?

Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is attributing to Satan the work of God. It is the combination of a clear knowledge of the truth and an intentional rejection of Jesus Christ, being fully aware of the light and hating the light in what is a persistent determination to extinguish the light. And this is the most serious sin that a person can commit. It is not so much an action as it is an attitude. It is conscious, willful rejection of the saving power and grace of God toward all men. It is to have a hostile attitude that rejects the Holy Spirit's witness in your heart, manifested in verbal denunciation.

Matthew 12:31-32—“Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.”

To denounce the work of the Holy Spirit and to assign it to the same category as the demonic is to commit grave sin for which there is no forgiveness. Its at that point that God gives that person over to the hardness of their own heart. No one can be saved apart from the convicting, drawing power of the Holy Spirit. And if you despise that work and condemn it in your own heart, how else can you be saved?

“Blasphemes” — *an aorist tense verb that is active in voice*

The idea that this is a person whose attitude is actively and presently despising the witness of the Spirit. Their attitude reveals that they are not saved, and apart from the Spirit's intervention in their life, they will remain unforgiven.

O.S. Hawkins—*“Why is this sin against the Holy Spirit unpardonable? It is not because the Holy Spirit is greater than the Father or the Son. I believe it is because He is later in the sense of this aspect of His ministry among us. The Holy Spirit is God’s final attempt to reach your soul with salvation. The Father revealed His redemptive plan throughout history. The Son, the Lord Jesus, came to carry it out by His substitutionary death on the cross. Finally, the Holy Spirit comes to convict us of sin, convince us of righteousness, lift up Christ, point us to Him, and call and lead us to salvation. No one is coming after the Holy Spirit. He is God Himself going as far as He will go to save you without forcing His will on you and making you a puppet rather than a person. The unpardonable sin, then, is the constant, consistent, willful rejection of the Holy Spirit’s witness to your heart.”*

It is resisting and despising His witness so much so that a person becomes spiritually calloused. It is what Paul refers to in Ephesians 4:19 where he says that a person is being past feeling. The word there means insensitive to feeling. When something is said to be calloused is to say that it has lost all sensitivity. Stick a pin in it, and there is nothing. It is dead. This is what happens to a person's heart when over and over against they reject the witness of the Spirit. Each time they reject Him, the 'callous' around their heart become a bit harder, and after a while it is not that the Holy Spirit ceases to knock. Rather, it is that they can no longer hear as they are 'past feeling.' This is why the Bible says:

Psalm 95:7—**“Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.”**

If the Spirit of God is dealing with you, don't harden your heart against Him. The writer of Hebrews uses this same verse and quotes it two times in Hebrews 3, warning us of the dangers of living with an evil, unbelieving heart. It is one that sees the proof of God's works, yet rejects Christ anyway. That's what the scribes and Pharisees do here. And Jesus warns them by saying, "All sins will be forgiven, including the blasphemies they utter. But the one who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin."

Mark L. Strauss, Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament — *"We could therefore define blasphemy of the Holy Spirit as defiant, willful, and final rejection of the Spirit's work in a person's life. If that person intentionally turns to darkness at the moment of greatest light, by definition no greater opportunity for salvation will ever take place. There is no greater source of revelation than the Holy Spirit and no other means through which people respond to God. It would also be true, then, that those who anguish over whether they have blasphemed the Spirit certainly have not, since such fears reveal a conscience still wrestling with God. Furthermore, since only God knows the entire course of a person's life, the only sure proof that someone has blasphemed the Holy Spirit will come on judgment day, when the hearts of all people will be revealed."*

The worst thing that can happen in a person's life is for the Spirit of God to no longer deal with them. The Lord said in Genesis 6:3, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man." There comes a point in time when the Holy Spirit ceases striving, convicting, and calling, and a person is left to the natural course of a sinful heart. Paul describes those in Romans 1 whom God has given up to consequences of their hardened hearts. There is no forgiveness, no eternal life, and nothing but hell awaits those who've had the most knowledge, the most

spiritual privilege, and yet still persist in their rejection of the Spirit's offer of salvation—and then they step out into eternity in that condition.

Assuming Jesus is nothing more than some religious figure is the first response, and accusing Jesus of evil motivation is the second. But third, notice:

3—The AFFIRMATION of His disciples (3:31-35)

“And His mother and His brothers came, and standing outside they sent to Him and called Him. And a crowd was sitting around Him, and they said to Him, ‘Your mother and Your brothers are outside, seeking You.’ And He answered them, ‘Who are My mother and My brothers?’ And looking about at those who sat around Him, He said, ‘Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother.”

I find here a third response to Jesus, and that is the one we see reflected in the lives of His disciples. They're sitting at His feet listening to His word. And then Jesus says that His true spiritual family is made up of those who do the will of God. Obeying His Word and doing His will. Elsewhere, Jesus said that we have no right to call Him our Lord if we do not do the things He says. And so the proper response to Him is obedient faith. What matters is not whether we're related to Him by physical birth, but whether we're trusting in Him as our only hope of salvation. That is what Jesus is saying here as Mark shifts the scene back to His family. As Jesus is teaching in the house, a crowd of His followers is gathered around Him. Someone says, “Your mother and Your brothers are outside, seeking You.” Notice what He says in verse 33, “Who are My mother and My brothers?”

Obviously, Jesus loved His family. But what He is saying here is this, “Human relationships can only get you so far, and they cannot give you standing with

God. The only relationship to Me that matters is the spiritual one in which a person has received Me in faith.” And so, in a sense, He keeps them at a distance. It is as though He says to His family, “It doesn’t matter that you’re related to Me through My mother. That carries no weight in the kingdom. That’s not going to get you into the kingdom.” And verse 34 says, “Looking about at those who sat around Him, Jesus said, ‘Here are My mother and My brothers!’” This is the person who has a true relationship to Me, because he is a disciple who has received Me in faith as their Lord. “For whoever does the will of God (obeys), he is My brother and sister and mother.” What matters is whether or not you are His disciple. It isn’t a matter of your first birth, but whether or not there has been a second. It isn’t about physical birth, but is about spiritual birth. Jesus told Nicodemus:

John 3:3—“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

Misunderstood by His family, maligned by His enemies, but magnified by His disciples. Three responses to the person of Jesus Christ. I wonder what response you have made to Him? What about those you love? I imagine that many of you know what it is like to be misunderstood by friends and family who do not share your faith. What do we do? Well, let me give you some closing principles:

- **Realize** that not everyone will understand your devotion to Christ.

Perhaps you’ve felt the scorn of family and friends because of your commitment to Jesus. I think about those in places around the world where a decision to follow Jesus means a dismissal from their family. Just this week, I read the story of a man in a middle eastern country that is predominately Muslim. He stood to

inherit his family's lucrative business, but made the decision to walk away from it having come to faith in Christ. And for him to make that decision meant his family turned their back on him. He was considered to be as good as dead to them. I can't help but wonder what our devotion to Christ would look like given those same set of circumstances. Would our devotion to Christ be as clear if it meant that our family turned their backs on us?

Not everyone will be enthusiastic about your decision to be a Christian. They may try to talk you out of it. They may call you a Bible thumper and a fanatic. But what we gain in Christ is far more than what we give up in the eyes of the world.

- **Remember** that you can't force others into believing or accepting your own convictions.

Whether it is family or friends, or someone you work beside that you're trying to reach. You cannot force them to come to Jesus. You're the believer, they're not. And you need to be aware of the fact that until the Lord changes their heart, they will not understand nor share the motivation you have in life. You can't do the work of the Holy Spirit. It is the role of the Spirit to open their eyes to the beauty of Jesus.

- **Resolve** that you will be prepared to share Christ when the time is right.

Don't assume that because a person is vehement in their refusal to trust Christ that they never will. Pray that the Holy Spirit continue to bring conviction to their heart, and that they respond to His prompting in time. You and I are called to simply be witnesses.

If you're concerned that you've committed the unforgivable sin, that is a sure sign that you've not committed it. Those who commit blasphemy of the Holy Spirit have attributed to Satan the power of God. They persist in their rejection of the Spirit's witness until they cross a threshold from which there is no return, calling good evil and evil good. But don't miss the wonderful truth of verse 28 for the one who trusts in Christ—"Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter."

The point of this passage is this—in light of all the evidence that is there, don't reject Jesus! Don't make the assumption that He is a religious figure and nothing more. Don't make the accusation that He is a liar and resist the witness of the Holy Spirit by rejecting Christ in your heart. Don't walk out the door today and assume that the opportunity to trust Christ will be there tomorrow. You must come to Him now while you still have time. Now is the accepted time, today is the day of salvation. The only saving response to Jesus is for you to place your faith in Him as your Savior and Lord!