

## Jesus and His Critics

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Mark 3:20-35

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The following series of advertisements reportedly appeared in a daily newspaper:

**Monday:** The Rev. A.J. Jones has one color TV set for sale. Telephone 626-1313 after 7 p.m. and ask for Mrs. Donnelley who lives with him, cheap.

**Tuesday:** We regret any embarrassment caused to Rev. Jones by a typographical error in yesterday's paper. The ad should have read: The Rev. A.J. Jones has one color TV set for sale, cheap...Telephone 626-1313 and ask for Mrs. Donnelley, who lives with him after 7 p.m.

**Wednesday:** The Rev. A.J. Jones informs us that he has received several annoying telephone calls because of an incorrect ad in yesterday's paper. It should have read: The Rev. A.J. Jones has one color TV set for sale, cheap. Telephone 626-1313 after 7 p.m. and ask for Mrs. Donnelley who loves with him.

**Thursday:** Please take notice that I, the Rev. A.J. Jones, have no color TV set for sale; I have smashed it. Don't call 626-1313 anymore. I have not been carrying on with Mrs. Donnelley. She was, until yesterday, my housekeeper.

**Friday:** Wanted: A housekeeper. Usual housekeeping duties. Good pay. Rev. A.J. Jones. Telephone 626-1313.

Sometimes mistakes are of minimal consequence. Other times, they are critical. The text before us this morning reveals mistakes or misunderstandings as it pertains to Jesus' identity and ministry. His family thinks He's lost His mind and the religious leaders accuse Him of being a cohort with Satan. Let's stand this morning as we read God's sufficient, authoritative, and inerrant Word. Mark, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, pens the following Words:

*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." 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." 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." Mark 3:20–35*

Brothers and sisters, the grass withers, and the flower fades, but the Word of our God stands forever (Isaiah 40:8).

### **I. JESUS WAS MISUNDERSTOOD AS BEING CRAZY (v.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."*

A survey of Matthew and Luke's gospel makes it evident that some time has elapsed between verse 19, where we ended last week, and verse 20, where we pick back up this morning. Sandwiched between these two verses are the events of Matthew 5-7 and Luke 7:20-8:3. This includes the preaching of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), the healing of the centurions' servant (Luke 7:1-10), the raising of the widow's son (Luke 7:11-17), and the forgiveness of the sinful woman who wet Jesus' feet with tears, dried them with her hair, and appointed them with costly oil (Luke 7:36-50). All these events take place between Mark 3:19 and 20. This gives us a little context when Mark tells us in verse 20 that Jesus "went home". Jesus has returned home from the mountain where He called His disciples. It's probable that home means Capernaum - more specifically, Peter's house.

As you can imagine, it didn't take long for word to get out that Jesus was in town and the crowds begin to gather "again". Everywhere Jesus goes, He is met with a sea of people. The last time Jesus was at Peter's house the crowd was so densely packed that there "wasn't even room at the door" (cf. Mark 2:2). This time the crowd again is so large that Jesus and His disciples don't even have time to eat. As we've noted before, the crowds are an obstacle rather than an asset to Jesus' ministry. But this time, more than the crowds, it's a different group that poses a threat to Jesus' mission.

Look at verse 21. Mark writes, “When His family heard it they went to seize Him for they were saying, ‘He is out of His mind.’” The ESV translates the text, “His family.” The original language reads much more vague and simply says the “ones beside Him.” I think Mark intentionally leaves these individuals ambiguous. Having said that, the phrase “the ones beside him” was a common Semitic idiom used to speak about a person’s family or kinsmen. John 2:12 tells us that Mary and Jesus’ brothers visited Jesus and His disciples in Capernaum early in His ministry. We’ll see Jesus’ mother and brothers show up in verse 31. Whoever the “ones beside Him” are, there is an obvious disconnect between Jesus’ agenda and their agenda for Him. When these friends, family, or both heard the crowds had gathered again, and that Jesus’ tireless ministry activity prevented Him from caring for His most basic needs (eating), they went to put a stop to it.

Mark writes that they “went out to seize Him...” The word translated “seize” is the Greek word κρατέω. It means to “take into custody” or “take charge”. The same word is used often in Mark’s gospel to describe the many attempts to arrest Jesus and thus deprive Him of His freedom.<sup>1</sup> What is the rationale of Jesus’ family? Those closest to Jesus think, “He is out of His mind.” I think they think Jesus is in over his head. His family would have undoubtedly been aware of His teaching, His healings, and His power over demons. If you can remember back to chapter 1, Mark told us that the fame of Jesus had spread everywhere throughout the surrounding region of Galilee (cf. Mark 1:28).

Jesus’ family would have been well aware that He was inundated by expectant crowds everywhere He went. They would have known that He had ruffled the feathers and raised the brows of the religious leaders and as a result was under their intense scrutiny. I think Jesus’ family and friends think He’s writing checks He can’t cash, and so they come to retrieve Him (possibly back to Nazareth). We also need to keep in mind that the culture Jesus lived in was heavily influenced by honor and shame. It’s possible that Jesus’ family went to “seize” Him to keep Him from bringing shame upon the family name. From a human perspective, it appears that Jesus’ friends and family have well-meaning intentions. However, they misread the evidence. Jesus wasn’t too busy nor was He out of His mind. He was simply carrying out His Father’s will (cf. John 4:34, 6:38). Even well-meaning individuals can encourage a departure from God’s will. This constitutes opposition, not assistance.

History reveals that God’s servants are usually misjudged by their contemporaries and often misunderstood by their families. Paul was called mad. Festus, who succeeded Felix as governor and later sent Paul to stand trial under Nero, told Paul that he was out of his mind. He said, “Your great learning is driving you out of your mind.” But Paul replied, “I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words” Acts 26:24-25. Other fellows like

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<sup>1</sup> James R. Edwards, *PNTC: The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 118.

Martin Luther, John Bunyan, John Wesley, and William Borden were all thought of as having lost their minds as a result of their zeal for Christ.

William Borden may or may not be a familiar name to some of you (read about him). Borden was converted as a young man under the preaching of R.A. Torrey in Chicago Avenue Church, which later became Moody Church. Borden, an heir to his family's massive fortune, graduated high school in Chicago in 1904 at the age of 16. As a graduation gift, his parents sent him on a trip around the world. As he traveled through Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, he felt a growing burden for the world's hurting people. Somewhere along his journey, young Borden wrote home and told his parents that he wanted to become a missionary. Upon hearing this news, one of Borden's friends expressed disbelief that he was "throwing himself away as a missionary." In response, he wrote two words in the back of his Bible: "**No reserves.**"

A year later, in 1905, Borden entered Yale University as freshman. All of his classmates, though they knew he was extremely wealthy, noticed that he was also extremely different. They saw settled purpose and devotion in Borden. During his college years, Borden made an entry in his personal journal that defined what his classmates were seeing in him. That entry simply said: Say "no" to self and "yes" to Jesus every time. During his college career, Borden began to meet together with another student in the morning before breakfast to read the Scriptures and pray. That small group of two quickly became three, four, five, and six. By the end of his first year, 150 freshmen were meeting weekly for Bible study and prayer. By the time Borden was a senior, one thousand of Yale's 1,300 students were meeting in such groups.

Upon graduation from Yale, Borden turned down some high-paying job offers. The desire to be a missionary burned within him. It has been reported that Borden wrote two more words in his Bible after his father told him that he would never hold a position in the family business. Those two words were: "**No retreats.**" Borden went on to do graduate work at Princeton Seminary in New Jersey and when he finished his studies, he sailed for China. Hoping to work with Muslims, he stopped first in Egypt to study Arabic. While he was there, he contracted spinal meningitis and within a month, 25-year-old William Borden was dead. Borden not only gave up his wealth, but his life as well. Many of his friends thought he had thrown all of his wealth and opportunity away for the lesser call of taking the gospel to the nations. Prior to his death, Borden had written two more words in the back of his Bible. Did Borden waste his life? Underneath the words "No reserves" and "No retreats," in his Bible, Borden wrote the words "**No regrets.**"<sup>2</sup> Friends, if we endeavor, and I pray we do, to live lives that are characterized by the words "No reserves," "No retreats," and "No regrets," we will, just like Jesus, be misunderstood.

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<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William\\_Whiting\\_Borden](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Whiting_Borden)

It's always true that a man who is on fire for God seems deranged to his contemporaries. The more like Christ we are, the more we too will experience the sorrow of being misunderstood by relatives and friends. If we set out to make a fortune, men will cheer us; if we are fanatics for Jesus Christ, they will jeer us.<sup>3</sup> Paul reminds us, "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned" 1 Corinthians 2:14.

J.C. Ryle encourages us, "Let it not shake our faith if we have to drink the same cup as our Lord. Hard as it may be to be misunderstood by our friends and family, we must remember that it is not a new thing. It was Jesus who said, "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" Matthew 10:37. Jesus knows the bitterness of your trials. Let us bear patiently with the unreasonableness of those who would set themselves up against us. Let us pity their blindness and pray that God would change their hearts. Those who oppose you now just might, by God's saving grace, stand with you later.

## **II. JESUS WAS MALIGNED AS BEING DEMON POSSESSED (v.22-30)**

The scribes didn't think Jesus was insane. They accused Him of being working with Satan. First Jesus refuted the erroneous claim and then He pronounced the judgment that would befall those who made it.

### **A FEW WORDS ABOUT BEELZEBUL (v.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".*

The scribes have traveled from Jerusalem to Capernaum in order to confront Jesus. Their seat in the temple authority signifies the official position of the religious establishments' opposition toward Jesus. It's interesting to note that they don't come asking questions like they have in the past. When Jesus healed the paralytic they asked, "Why does this man speak like that?" When Jesus was seen mingling with tax collector and sinners they asked, "Why does He eat with tax collector and sinners?" When Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath and his disciples picked up grain from the fields on the Sabbath they asked, "Why are [your disciples] doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" But they aren't asking questions anymore. Now, they are making statements.

Notice that the scribes don't deny Jesus' power to perform miracles. They have clearly witnessed His power. Neither do they accuse Him of being an imposter. They recognize His power to perform miracles, but they attribute Jesus' source of power to "Beelzebul" rather God. The exact meaning of "Beezebul" is difficult to pin down. "Beel" comes from the pagan God "Baal".

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<sup>3</sup> William Macdonald.

“Beelzebul” means “master of the house” or “Lord of the dwelling place.” The scribes are charging Jesus with being possessed by a demon and thus driving out demons through a power alliance with Satan, the prince (ruler) of demons.

### **JESUS SPOKE IN PARABLES (v.23)**

*And he called them to him and said to them in parables, “How can Satan cast out Satan?”*

Can you imagine what the scribes must have been thinking as Jesus called them to Himself. They were well aware of the man standing before them. This is the first time Jesus teaches using a parable in Mark’s gospel. The English word parable comes from the Greek word παραβολή. It’s a compound from the words *para* – “alongside” and *ballo* – to “throw” or “cast.” A parable is a story that comes alongside a teaching to help illustrate its meaning. Jesus used this method of teaching often. As a matter of fact, we’ll see Him employ it heavily in chapter four as He unpacks the Parable of the Sower and the Parable of the Mustard Seed. The point of a parable is to engage the listener so deeply that he or she is compelled to make a clear decision regarding God’s truth in their life. Parables were meant to arrest attention and arouse interest. They serve, like the rest of God’s Word, as a mirror that reflects truth upon on hearts (cf. James 1:22-24). The parables that Jesus used are meant to judge the thoughts and intentions of our hearts. They are meant to bring us face to face with who God is, how wicked our hearts are, how desperately we need Him, and how humble and submissive we are to come to Him.

#### **A. DIVIDED KINGDOM CANNOT STAND (v.24)**

*If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. (Civil war)*

#### **B. DIVIDED HOUSE CANNOT STAND (v.25)**

*And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. (Domestic violence)*

#### **C. DIVIDED PERSON CANNOT STAND (v.26)**

*And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end. (Snake that attacks itself)*

#### **D. STRONG MAN PARABLE (v.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.*

Satan is the strong man in this parable. His house is dominion. Paul was referring to Satan when he said, “The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” 2 Corinthians 4:4. Satan’s goods are the people whom he holds in his sway. Jesus is the One, by His own power and authority, who will bind the strong man and plunder his house. Jesus is plundering Satan’s

house today. Every time someone comes to saving faith in Christ, Satan's house is plundered. Jesus has come to destroy the works of the devil (cf. 1 John 3:8) and set captives free (John 8:36). Though Satan exercises a measure of control in this world, he is like a leashed dog. He has range, but he doesn't have free range. He has power, but he doesn't have omnipotence. Paul reminds us, "[Jesus] disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him" Colossians 2:15.

And there is soon coming a day, when Jesus Christ will return and bind Satan for a thousand years in the bottomless pit (cf. Revelation 20:1-3). Satan is the strong man, but Jesus is the strongest. Jesus, casting out demons during His earthly ministry, serves as a foreshadow of His future binding of Satan forever (cf. Revelation 20:10).

## **BLASPHEMY AGAINST THE HOLY SPIRIT: THE UNPARDONABLE SIN**

### **A. IT IS POSSIBLE TO BE FORGIVEN ALL YOUR SINS (v.28)**

*"Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter,*

J.C. Ryle rightly draws our attention to the phrase, "All sins will be forgiven the children of man." These words fall lightly on the ears of many persons. They see no particular beauty in them. But to the man who is alive to his own sinfulness and deeply sensible of his need of mercy, these words are sweet and precious. "All sins will be forgiven" means the sins of youth and age, the sins of head, hand, tongue, imagination. It means sins against all God's commandments, the sins of persecutors like Paul, the sins of idolaters, like Manasseh (sacrificed his children on a pagan altar), the sins of adulterers and murders like David, the sins of drunkenness like Noah, and the sins of back peddlers, like Peter. All may be forgiven. The blood of Christ can cleanse them all. The righteousness of Christ can cover them all and hide them from God's eyes. For those who have come to Christ by faith have been plunged beneath the flood. Though their sins have been as scarlet, they shall be white as snow (cf. Isaiah 1:18).

### **B. IT IS POSSIBLE FOR A MAN'S SOUL TO BE LOST FOREVER IN HELL (v.29-30)**

*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."*

The term blasphemy can be defined as "defiant irreverence." Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit has to do with accusing Jesus Christ of being demon-possessed instead of Spirit-filled. I would submit to you that this particular type of blasphemy cannot be duplicated today. The Pharisees were in a unique moment in history: they had the Law and the Prophets, they had the Holy Spirit stirring their hearts, they had the Son of God Himself standing right in front of them, and they saw with their own eyes the miracles He did, yet they chose defiance. They purposely

attributed the work of the Spirit to the devil, even though they knew the truth and had the proof. Jesus declared their willful blindness to be unpardonable. Their blasphemy against the Holy Spirit was their final rejection of God's grace. They had set their course, and God was going to let them sail into destruction unhindered.

The "unpardonable sin" today is the state of continued unbelief. It isn't taking of the Lord's name in vain. It is very simply the ongoing, continual rejection of the Holy Spirit's witness to Christ. The Spirit currently convicts the unsaved world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8). To resist that conviction and willfully remain unrepentant is to "blaspheme" the Spirit. It's not an isolated act but rather a willful and continual attitude. It's an indifference to sin and a cynical rejection of God's grace. If you are concerned that you have committed this sin, you can rest assured that the very fact that you have concern about it means you have not committed it. John tell us, "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). He goes on to tell us, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him" (John 3:36).<sup>4</sup>

Friends, it is possible for a man's soul to be lost forever. We find this truth to be asserted over and over again through the Scriptures. Figures of all kinds are multiplied and language of every sort is employed to make it plain, evident, and unmistakable. Popular teaching says that God's love makes impossible the reality of an everlasting hell. Teachers have risen up who openly attack the doctrine of eternal punishment. This is foolish. Let us flee for refuge to the hope set before us in the gospel and never rest until we know we are safe. And don't let anyone shame you for hoping in Christ. He isn't a crutch for the broken; He is a Savior for the dead.

### **III. JESUS WAS UNMISTAKEABLE ABOUT WHO HIS FAMILY IS (v.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."*

Verses 31-35 are likely a continuation of verses 20-21. Mark, on a number of occasions, communicated using this "sandwich" style of writing. He began talking about Jesus' friends and family being concerned for His welfare – he sandwiched in the story of the Scribes calling Him out as a working by the power of Satan – and now he picks back up with Jesus' mother and brothers standing outside the house where He was staying. Here is Jesus, with a crowd sitting around Him, and someone lets Him know His mother and brothers are outside seeking Him.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/blasphemy-Holy-Spirit.html>

Jesus took this opportunity as a teachable moment. Jesus isn't disparaging His biological family. He is, on the other hand, broadening the reference beyond those present by stating that whoever does God's will is a member of His family. The words brother, sister and mother figuratively denote Jesus' spiritual family. Doing God's will characterizes those who are Jesus' spiritual family. Are you a part of Jesus' spiritual family? For those of us who know Christ savingly, we are closer and more enduring family than flesh and blood family. This has massive implications on how we treat each other in the Church. Are we loving, serving, caring for, and thinking for our spiritual family? Following Jesus means you 'll be misunderstood and maligned. Will you, like Borden, follow with no reserves, no retreats, and no regrets?

## **CLOSING BENEDICTION**

As we bring our corporate worship to a close this morning, hear this benediction: "Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it" 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24. And all God's people said, "Amen!" Go in peace!