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“Jesus: Lunatic, Liar, or Lord”
Mark 3:20-35

Introduction

Every day we are assaulted with questions. Some involve routine daily life: What am I going to wear, do, or eat today? Other questions involve major decisions such as 1) What career do I want to pursue? 2) After high school, will I go to college or get a job or go into the military? 3) Who will I marry? 4) Should I take this job or stay with my current one? A few questions, however, have eternal implications such as “Which religion will I pursue? Is the Bible the Word of God? “Who is Jesus Christ?” and “If Jesus Christ is really who He says He is, what response does that call for in my life?”

The last two questions are ones we will ponder this week and next. To seek answers to them I invite you to look at Mark 3. Mark's gospel highlights the actions and words of Jesus Christ. So far in this book, Jesus has spent much time teaching large crowds, healing hundreds of people with all sorts of terrible diseases, and delivering people who were possessed with demons. Along the way huge crowds were following him seeking more miracles. The country's religious leaders constantly badgered him because he attacked the very core of their teachings and because He was highly popular. They feared he would siphon people away from them and they would lose power and influence.

To get away from this, Jesus went up to a mountain to pray all night and to summon twelve men to be his representatives--to carry on his work once died and rose again. He commissioned them to be with him, to be his closest associates, and to then to send them out to proclaim his message and to cast out demons.

Mark's gospel doesn't record what happens next [no one gospel includes everything Jesus taught or did], but immediately after appointing twelve men, he gives what is commonly known as the Sermon on the Mount, which was his longest recorded sermon. Mark 3:20 tells us what happens next in Jesus' life.

“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)

Returning to a town in Israel called Capernaum, on the northwest shore of a lake called Galilee, we see two possible answers to the question of who Jesus is based on two exchanges that happen in this section of Mark. By Jesus' response to his interaction with two groups we then see a third option about who Jesus is.

Well-known English writer, C. S. Lewis, of *The Chronicles of Narnia* fame, also wrote other books in which he sought to explain the Christian faith. In *The Case for Christianity*, there is a place where Lewis interacts with those who perceive Jesus as merely a good teacher, moral leader, or wise and compassionate man. Lewis responds,

I'm trying here to prevent anyone from saying the really silly 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's the one thing we mustn't say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said wouldn't be a great moral teacher. He'd either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he's a poached egg—or else he'd 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 don't let us come with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He hasn't left that open to us. He didn't intend to.

Hence the title of the message this morning: Jesus is either lunatic, liar, or Lord. He was either deranged, a demoniac, or He is deity—the very Son of God who commands our allegiance and obedience in all of life.

The theme of this passage is very simple and straightforward: there are those who think they have a claim on Jesus and then there are those who allow Jesus to have a claim on them! The first group involves his own family and the religious big-wigs of his day. Some were misguided in their claims and others were malicious. Both are trying to arrest and control Jesus, but Jesus turns the tables and talks about those He arrests and controls. The second involves his disciples then as well as anyone today who does His will. Jesus calls such his brothers, sisters and mothers.

One final introductory note. This passage could be best illustrated by a sandwich. The two pieces of bread involve the story of Jesus' family thinking he has gone

mad and trying to get through the crowd to him. Sandwiched in between is the story of Jesus' interaction with the religious heavyweights who accuse him of being possessed by Satan and being an agent of Satan. The way Mark tells the story regarding his family's visit, starting off with it and then panning to the scene inside the house and then back outside once the family arrives heightens the tension, draws attention to the narrative, provides contrasts but shows how **the two events interpret each** other and really draw both Jesus' family and the religious leaders together as opposing Jesus on different, yet similar, grounds.

So, let's get started this week and consider who Jesus was: lunatic, liar or Lord.

Jesus, the lunatic?

This story starts with a crowd. They don't know really who Jesus is yet. They don't perceive him as a lunatic or a liar but they haven't been convicted that He is Lord either. Few of them will ever come to faith in Jesus Christ. You don't hear them crying out like the voice from heaven, "This is God's Son!" You don't hear them confessing as a horde of demons have already, "We know who you are—Jesus, Son of God!" Most of them are there for the miracles, the healings, the exorcisms. By the time Jesus dies it appears as if there are only several hundred, maybe a few thousand devoted followers of Christ. No these are here because they can't get enough of the miracles, the entertainment, the benefits which keep coming from this man. Never before in the history of Israel had their been a prophet or a rabbi like this man who literally drew crowds of over 20,000 people.

But 30 miles away, the word on the street, was that Jesus was going crazy. And his family decided enough was enough. The Bible, originally written in Greek, reads "And those from his side" heard it. This Greek idiom is translated "those with him" (KJV), "his own people" (NASB, NKJV), or "his family" (ESV, NIV) but most scholars and Bible interpreters believe this is a reference to his immediate family—primarily because of what follows, the other piece of bread in the sandwich in verses 31-32.

His family goes out to "seize" him—a word used about ten times in Mark's gospel—usually in terms of the religious leaders trying to arrest Jesus. They started on this 30 mile journey with the intent of taking Jesus back to Nazareth and keeping him out of the public eye.

Why? Because they were saying, "He is out of his mind!" "He's gone beserk! He's crazy! A madman! He's deranged. We have to save Jesus from Himself—from the consequences of his own delusion.

Why did they do this? Several reasons. First, they really loved him. How much easier it would have been to just let Jesus just go his way and just "disown" him. Secondly, they were genuinely concerned that Jesus religious concerns were

ruining his own health. I mean, now he didn't even have time to eat. And this would not be the only time this happened. Thirdly, they just believed his zeal was not bordering on radicalism. Hey, if he wanted to sort of stir the pot, that was one thing. But he's totally out of balance—staying up all night to pray, not eating, massive crowds swooning over him, and he is taking on the establishment now and when that happens people will do anything to hang on to their power, prestige, and money. Same today!

They concluded Jesus was a lunatic. What was their evidence? 1) He had a great thing going in Capernaum preaching and healing and after one day there, he decides to leave and go to less impressive, smaller villages to preach 2) He was claiming the power to forgive sins completely—which only God could do 3) He was taking the religious elite on—head on, making no bones that they were not of God and their man-made traditions were not of God 4) and horror of horrors, he is now associating quietly and happily with tax collectors, sinners, and the down and outers of that society.

Enough is enough! His religious zeal had got the better of him. Off to get him and save him from himself and save the family any further shame, they decided.

By the way, when people become radical disciples of Jesus Christ, the same is often said of them. Felix thought that Paul had gone out of his mind (Acts 26:24). The church leaders of the 16th century said the same about Martin Luther in his protests against the church. D. L. Moody was dismissed as “crazy Moody” by the more staid and detached religious leaders of his day.

But here is the problem: lunatics don't heal sick people, raise the dead or cast out demons. Lunatics don't speak the way Jesus did; they don't act like Jesus did. Lunatics don't attract women and children and are not marked normally by compassion, sorrow, and mercy.

No, Jesus was not a lunatic. His mind was the most pure and perfect one ever known to man. His teaching was the most profound. No one ever spoke like Jesus did—the overflow of pure, profound, divine reason.

However, dropping down to verse 31, later that same day or the next, “his mother and his brothers came and standing outside they sent to him and called him” and let it be known “your mother and your brothers are outside seeking you.”

Many interesting points here. First, these verses again highlight the authenticity of the gospel, for mere men would not have included this story. It would not have made it past the apostles' vetting process. But this is inspired by God and He wanted it included. Mary is present, but not as an unbelieving person. She was not sinless as some traditions teach but she also was a godly, devout believer in

Jesus already. Her presence indicates likely that her faith is weak at this point and insufficient to resist the determination of her sons to restrain Jesus and bring him home. No doubt she came out of a desire to rescue Jesus and protect him but not because she thought he was crazy.

However her brothers whose names we learn of in Mark 6:3 James, Joses, Judas, and Simon along with his sisters did think he was crazy. John tells us that they did not believe in Jesus (7:5).

Jesus' father is likely dead by now, but when Jesus was twelve, he and his parents went up to the feast in Jerusalem. After observing it together and Jesus becoming a “son of the law”, their group headed back to Nazareth—his parents assuming Jesus was with the group. But they discovered that he wasn't and when they headed back to Jerusalem. Luke writes,

“After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, “Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress.” And he said to them, “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart.” (Luke 2:46–51)

Jesus spends the next eighteen years or so in Nazareth with his family, but early on his own siblings must have considered him odd. I mean Jesus never got in trouble, he never did anything wrong. That must have been frustrating to no end to them. They may have ostracized him or at least thought this strange. Mary and Joseph never had any of the normal problems we have with raising children. And it was just that Jesus was passive and compliant. Oh no, he was perfect!

But still for those thirty years, Jesus lived a fairly normal life. I mean he didn't act like God. He didn't create things or heal people. He could have but his time had not yet come. He didn't teach in the synagogue, take advanced courses under the rabbis or cast out demons. But ever since he moved away from Nazareth—well, that was different story. After he preached his first message in Nazareth and said that the Scripture was fulfilled about Messiah in their hearing and the people drove him out of town and wanted to throw him off the cliff—that is when things seemed to snap a bit, his family thought looking back. Now, they were convinced he had lost his mind and had gone over the edge.

We see Jesus interacting with Mary early in his ministry—in his first miracle at Cana in Galilee—where he turns the water into wine (John 2). There Jesus has to mildly rebuke his mother and remind her that He is now about His Father's business and his time had not yet come.

Well, now it is rather interesting and poignant: Jesus is on the inside with all of his disciples closest to him and his family is standing on the outside. Normally you would think the family would be on the inside very close to Jesus and all the other people would be on the outside—this is the element of foreshadowing. What a contrast. And so the family starts asking people to get a message to their brother: “Come out and come home with us!” Can't you almost hear this message being passed from one person to another till someone shouts, “Your mother and brothers are outside seeking you.” And Jesus know what they are thinking, “They think I am a lunatic!” We will come back to this story at the end and watch how Jesus handles this interruption.

Jesus, the liar?

But for now, let's look at the story in the middle which begins in verse 22 and suggests another opinion: Jesus is a fraud. He is a deceiver. He says he is doing this because He is God but really, he is a demoniac. “And the scribes—these are the highly trained, legal specialists in religion who are sent out by the top brass in Jerusalem to assess this new threat to their system—“The scribes came down from Jerusalem.” That is both a metaphorical and a geographical statement. They “came down” in the sense they left the “holy city of Jerusalem to check out this city caught up in this rebel rabbi frenzy. But they also came down from about 2400 feet above sea level to a place that is actually below sea level. The travel from the citadel of supposed Jewish orthodoxy to see if they should declare Capernaum an officially “seduced city” --following this rabbi.

Matthew tells us on this day “*a demon-oppressed man who was blind and mute was brought to him, and he healed him, so that the man spoke and saw. And all the people were amazed, and said, “Can this be the Son of David?”*” (Matthew 12:22–23). This was one of many creative miracles Jesus did. By creative I mean he made the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the paralyzed to walk, and the dead to rise. The evidence was irrefutable. But the religious leaders fail to believe in Jesus. So there only option is call him a liar! There is something supernatural going on here and they know that there are only two supernatural groups—God who has angels and Satan who has demons. But since they have decided that Jesus can't be who He says He is, they immediately accuse Jesus of being a liar.

Now this just goes to show you that if people just could see an outburst of miracles like in Moses' or in Jesus' day then there would be massive conversions to Jesus is not true. The scribes have massive evidence who Jesus is but they don't believe. You see, faith is not an automatic, inevitable, or necessary result of witnessing God's power. The words, actions and miracles are substantial proof of Jesus' deity but evidence demands interpretation and response and because of the hardness of man's heart many refuse to believe. Faith judges the person and work of Jesus as standing in perfect relationship to God; disbelief, in spite of the

evidence, concludes that who Jesus is and what He teaches is not true, therefore, he must be from the devil. And this is what they “were saying” repeatedly!

Two charges. “He is possessed by Beelzebul—a name for Satan, likely meaning “lord of the dwelling or temple” meaning Satan is the ruler of the demons and unclean spirits. In other words, Satan possesses Jesus' soul. Second, “and by the prince of demons [again Satan], he casts out demons!” They can't deny the supernatural power so they impugn the source of his power.

Basically, they were advocating this view of Jesus, “He is a liar!” Popular opinion thought he was doing works of God. They rejected that and had to change that. But they couldn't conclude that he was insane because insanity doesn't produce supernatural power. So they argued, “He is in cahoots with the devil!”

So Jesus calls them over (v. 23) and refutes their theory with a few illustrations that show the absurdity of their position (vv. 24-26). “If I were casting out demons by Satan's power, Satan's kingdom would be imploding. That's civil war! No kingdom divided against itself can stand. I mean the Jews knew that. They had been divided for 300 years at one point in their history and everything came crashing down. If Satan is casting out demons by one who has a demon, then he's finished! What a ridiculous charge! That is so irrational.

Then, verse 27, after refutation comes explanation. “But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods unless he first binds the strong man [a play on words with Beelzebul]. Then indeed he may plunder his house.” The meaning of this “nuclear parable” is simple, “Satan is the supposed strong man here. He owns a house characterized by death, sin, sickness and it is inhabited with demons. “His goods” are people who are enslaved by one or more of these things. The only way to free people then from sin, sickness, and death is to first overpower the strong man—Satan. That is what Jesus did during his 40 days of temptation in the wilderness, as he was casting out demons during his three-year ministry, as he died for sinners on the cross, and as he rose triumphantly as he predicted three days later. By the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus was plundering Satan. Satan is an already defeated foe, though final overthrow awaits the establishment of Christ's kingdom when He comes to earth a second time.

Jesus can't be in collusion with Satan. In fact, He is actually destroying Satan's work which means, He is the one who more powerfully works—the one John the Baptist says, “is more powerful, mightier, than I.”

Jesus, a liar? No way. Liars don't raise people from the dead, they don't heal organic, verifiable, systemic diseases. Liars don't banish disease virtually from a nation for three years. Liars don't dominate demonic activity. And liars don't rise from the dead and appear to over 500 witnesses.

Jesus is Lord!

So Jesus isn't a lunatic. And he isn't a liar. His very next words are (verse 28), "Truly I say to you!" Jesus is the Truth! He delivers solemnly one of the greatest promises in all God's Word followed by one of the most terrifying warnings. "All sins will be forgiven the children of man and whatever blasphemies they utter [including blasphemy against the Son of Man—Luke 12:10]. But then this warning, "whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness but is guilty of eternal sin" What does all that mean? We will cover that next week—but let me tell you this much. This passage is one that is designed to comfort the frightened and to frighten the comfortable. I will leave it at that. So if you wonder, "How can I have all my sins forgiven?" or "Have I committed the unpardonable sin?" we will answer those questions next week—or you can speak with me or someone else afterward and we will be glad to tell you right now.

In the remainder of our time, I want to cut back, just like Mark's gospel does, to what happens when Jesus' family arrives outside this packed house! And I want us to see the only true option. Jesus isn't deranged. He's not a liar! He is Lord! He's not deranged or a demoniac! He is deity—the Son of God!

The word has finally gotten to Jesus. "Your mother and brothers are seeking you" (3:22). Jesus answers them, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" Jesus is the master of interruption. Whether he is interrupted while praying or when addressing a crowd or when sleeping in a boat or traveling along the road conversing with his friends, Jesus knows how to turn an interruption into a springboard for making a profound pronouncement. Verse 33: So, "looking around about those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers." What a great study—the looks and the gestures of Jesus. He looks at his disciples initially and with a wave of his hands says, "This is my true family."

Now Jesus isn't saying, "I don't know who my biological family is." He isn't disrespecting his family or acting in an unloving manner toward them. He doesn't resent his family. After all, in the midst of his greatest suffering he made sure that his mother would be well cared for and made provisions for her while hanging on the cross. And although his brothers thought he was crazy now, they would later become zealous followers of him, one of them becoming the pastor of the church in Jerusalem leader in the church and two of them writing NT books bearing their names: James and Jude. They both describe themselves as "servants of Jesus Christ."

Rather Jesus is saying that spiritual relationships have to be subordinated to earthly family relationships. And in some cases, as Jesus illustrates here and teaches elsewhere, being a part of Jesus' family requires adjusting or in rare cases severing relationships with one's earthly family. Warren Wiersbe explains it,

Our Lord was not suggesting that believers ignore or abandon their families in order to serve God, but only that they put God's will above everything else in life. Our love for God should be so great that our love for family would seem like hatred in comparison (Luke 14:26). Certainly it is God's will that we care for our families and provide for them (see 1 Tim. 5:8), but we must not permit even our dearest loved ones to influence us away from the will of God. When you consider the importance of the family in the Jewish society, you can imagine how radical Christ's words must have sounded to those who heard them.

So who's in Jesus' family? Verse 35, "Whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother." True disciples are those who are in relationship to Jesus and who do the will of God.

How does one get into Jesus' family? The family of God? You might think, we are all God's children. We are in the limited sense that we are all made in the image of God. But we are not all God's children in the sense that we are all in His family. You see God made us in His likeness, in His image. He created the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, to be in his family and for a brief time they enjoyed a close relationship with God. But God gave them one rule to obey and they willfully and knowingly disobeyed God's Word. They did not do the will of God. Their sin, as the first human beings, has been passed down to all men. All of us have sinned and the result is alienation. Alienation is everywhere we look. In homes—I heard about a class of 2nd graders in a middle class community where over 60% of the children came from divorced homes. In the workplace—where there is often rancor and tension. In our nation—where often injustice goes unpunished and people are more divided than ever before. And most important, people alienated from God. Into this divisive world, Jesus entered to secure reconciliation between God and man by becoming the sacrifice that God accepted for the sins of all who would repent of their sin and trust in Him alone for the forgiveness of every sin they would commit.

That is how you enter Jesus' family. By being born from above! "Whoever does the will of God." Notice that statement is inclusive! That is everyone who does God's will is in the family. But notice the exclusiveness of that statement. It is only those who do the will of God who do. And finally notice the directional emphasis of that statement. It is those who continue to do the will of God, not perfectly, not 100% of the time, but that is the direction of their life—they live to please God. Why? Because they recognize that it is by grace you have been saved through faith. It is not of ourselves, lest any one of us should be full of pride saying, "Look what we did!" It is not of works lest any man should boast.

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. " (Matthew 7:21)

"As he said these things, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, 'Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed!' But he said, 'Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!'" (Luke 11:27–28)

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ” (John 14:15)

“If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. ” (John 15:10)

“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. ” (James 1:22)

“Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, ” (1 John 2:4)

“Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. ” (1 John 3:7)

“Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us. ” (1 John 3:24)

Where do you see yourself in this story today? Are you among the crowd who just want Jesus to do something for you but you aren't about to commit your life to Him and trust Him forever? Are you like the religious leaders—you have enough information about Jesus Christ but you think Jesus lied about Himself. Are you like his family who thought Jesus was off the deep end? Or will you be like the last person Jesus describes—who by God's grace follows Him and says, “I want to do the will of God the rest of my life”? Who do you believe Jesus is?

You know, the sanest thing you can do this day is to trust Him completely for salvation from God's just wrath against your sin. The sanest thing you can today is to hear Jesus' words as truth. Jesus said, “He who believes in me, though He were dead, yet shall he live!” Do you believe this?

Will you cry out to God right now and say, “O God, I want to be in your family today by trusting Your Son to save me from my sin! I know and fully confess that I am a sinner undeserving of your mercy and grace. I believe that Jesus is your Son who came and died for my sin. I repent of my sin and trust in Christ today to save me! I believe in Christ and want to do your will. Save me, O God, right now! I come in Jesus' name! Amen!”

You and I have no claim on Jesus but may we recognize the rightful claim Jesus has on our lives by His grace and for God's glory!