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The Identity of Jesus: Lord, Liar, or Lunatic?

Mark 3:20-35

I. The Most Important Question: Who Is Jesus?

A. This morning, we come to **the most important question** you will ever face... who is Jesus Christ??

1. Certainly we face many important questions in life
2. Ultimate questions of being, of purpose, of identity... Who am I? Why am I alive? What is my purpose in life? Where am I going? What do I believe?
3. Lesser questions along the way: What should I major in in college? What should my profession be? Who should I marry? Where should I live? What kind of car should I buy? Who should I vote for?
4. Dear friends, of all the questions you will ever face, there is nothing that is more significant than this one... **“What do I believe about Jesus Christ?”**
5. Why is that more important than any other? Because your eternal destiny hangs on your answer to that one question... a right answer results in eternity in heaven, a wrong answer results in eternity in hell
6. All of the others mostly just shape your temporary existence in this dying world
7. But this one... this is the ultimate fork in your road

B. Not Posed Here in this Chapter... But It Is the Whole Point of the Gospel

1. Jesus asked Peter

Mark 8:29 "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Christ."

2. All four gospels are written to bring you to the right answer... to give you sufficient reasons to confess that Jesus is Lord, God the Son, in human form; that his mission from heaven to earth was for our salvation from sin
3. All four gospels give you enough to make the right answer... IF you see his miracles properly and understand his teachings properly

C. Many Faulty Answers... Then and Now

Mark 8:27-28 Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?"²⁸ They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."

1. Those were positive answers... speaking WELL of Jesus; we will see in our text today some TOXIC answers, speaking poorly of him and his teachings and miracles
2. But today, we find a generally POSITIVE view of Jesus; he has a so-called "good reputation" among people of the so-called "Christianized" West

D. The Most Common False Answer: "Great moral teacher"

1. Ligonier survey, 2020: "Who is Jesus Christ?"

Stunningly 30% of people identifying as "evangelicals" agreed with the statement, "Jesus was a great teacher, but he was not God."

2. Great danger for the "evangelical church"... that people think it is enough to have a generally positive view of Jesus as a kind, loving leader who taught great things and who loved people but who was not actually God in human form
3. I think this is the normative view in America today more broadly... back in 2002, Gallup did a similar survey and while 80% answered

that they believed that Jesus was “the Son of God,” a closer look at the data showed that only half of that 80% held that Jesus was the incarnate God—God in human flesh—fully God, fully man; the rest said that Jesus was the “Son of God” only in the sense that he was a man uniquely called by God to reveal God’s purpose in the world

4. In other words, that Jesus was a great moral teacher; but not the Son of God

E. C.S. Lewis’s “Trilemma”

1. C.S. Lewis, the great Christian thinker from England; wrote a book on the basics of the Christian faith; *Mere Christianity*... since 2001 alone it has sold 3.5 million copies in English; it has been instrumental in the conversions of hundreds of thousands of people all over the world
2. One of the most famous parts is the “trilemma”... on the identity of Jesus Christ: Lord, Liar, Lunatic
 - a. Essential to this trilemma is that Jesus claimed to be God in the flesh... which he did in many ways
 - i) He forgave all the paralyzed man’s sins, and his enemies rightly said “Who can forgive sins but God alone?”
 - ii) He called himself “Lord of the Sabbath”
 - iii) He said to his enemies, “Before Abraham was born, I am”
 - iv) He said “Moses wrote about me”
 - v) Defending his healing work on the Sabbath, he said “My father is always working and I too am working”
 - vi) NO DOUBT ABOUT IT... in every way possible, Jesus claimed to be God
 - b. Here’s where the trilemma comes in... a man who makes such a claim cannot be merely a good moral teacher; his claim is either true or false; if his claim is true, we should worship him as Lord (that is, God); if his claim is false—he wasn’t God—either he

knew it was false and was intentionally deceiving the people (liar) or he didn't know it was false, and he was himself deluded and crazy (lunatic)

- c. Lewis did not invent this trilemma... actually Scottish preacher John Duncan first wrote it in 1859; Watchman Nee repackaged it in 1936
- d. But Lewis's version is the most famous

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—on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else 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 let us not come with any patronising nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. . . . Now it seems to me obvious that He was neither a lunatic nor a fiend: and consequently, however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that He was and is God.

- 3. The passage we are studying today neatly divides up along these three lines... Lunatic (crazy person), Liar (deceiver of the people) or Lord

F. This Complex Passage

1. Context

- a. (Mark 3:8-12) Jesus' overpoweringly popular ministry... a river of healings, including driving out many demons
- b. Popular opinion about Jesus... who is this man??? What are we to make of this unprecedented phenomenon??

2. Structure

- a. Vs. 20-21: Jesus' earthly (biological) family's deep concerns about Jesus; they think he is out of his mind; they go to take charge of him
- b. Vs. 22-30: the Scribes (Teachers of the Law) have also heard about Jesus and they come to investigate; they don't deny the miracles, but they conclude exactly the opposite from the truth—it is by Satan that Jesus is driving out demons; Jesus addresses their accusations/interpretations
- c. Vs. 31-35: Jesus' family arrives to take charge of him, and Jesus defines his true family: those who "do God's will"... clearly meaning believing in him as the Son of God

So... an "X" structure... A-B-A

3. Issues

- a. [Main issue: identity of Jesus] WHO IS JESUS? What are we to make of this amazing man and his astonishing works????
- b. [Jesus' biological family (his mother and brothers)]... their views of Jesus and his views of them
- c. [The origin of Jesus' supernatural power] The accusation of the scribes of Jerusalem: Jesus is possessed by Satan; by Satan's power he is driving out demons
- d. [The nature of Satan's kingdom] Jesus' answer #1: How can Satan drive out Satan?
- e. [The nature of Jesus' ministry] Jesus' answer #2: Overpowering the strong man and rescuing his possessions... our salvation as an act of spiritual warfare, spiritual plunder
- f. [Sins that can be pardoned and a sin that can NEVER be forgiven] Jesus' answer #3: Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit... what does that mean? Have I committed the unpardonable sin?

g. [The true family of Jesus] Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?

4. TOO MUCH to cover in one sermon!!

G. Our Focus Today... the Identity of Jesus

1. First, his earthly family will reveal their answer, at least at this point—they thought he was out of his mind... I will call it **“deluded lunatic”**
2. Then, the Scribes from Jerusalem will reveal their answer... that Jesus was possessed by a demon or maybe even Satan himself... a **“demonic liar”**
3. Finally, when Jesus’ family arrives to take charge of him, Jesus will put them in their place and declare who his true family is... those who “do the will of God”... and what is that? To believe in the One he has sent! And what must we believe? That Jesus is **“divine Lord”**

II. His Earthly Family’s Answer: Deluded Lunatic

Mark 3:20-21 Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. ²¹ When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind."

A. The Press of the Crowd

1. Overwhelming and demanding; so overpowering that Jesus does not get a moment to himself, and neither do his disciples
2. His relentless compassion led him to push his physical body to the edge day after day; he got little sleep, ministering to huge crowds after sundown, getting up while it was still dark, a great while before dawn; he frequently went without food
3. And the crowds will never let up... there is no end in sight!! Where was all this heading??
4. In this case, he goes into a house to get away... it’s the end of the day, maybe they will give him a chance to eat and get some rest...

NO WAY! Their pain and their concern for life itself would drive them on to seek healing

B. Jesus' Family

1. The text just says literally “those near him” or “those around him”... but it is clear from verse 31 that it includes Jesus' mother and brothers
2. Jesus had biological half-brothers... Mary was not a perpetual virgin, but she and Joseph had four sons together, along with a number of daughters; Mark 6 names Jesus' brothers: James, Joseph, Simon, Judas; also said he had SISTERS
3. In John 7, we learn a very important fact about his brothers:

John 7:5 even his own brothers did not believe in him.

4. They had seen him grow up in their parents' home; they had never seen him sin; it wasn't until he began his public ministry by changing the water into wine (John 2) that Jesus performed his first miracle; but clearly his sinless perfection made him different than any man who ever lived
5. Though they saw his miracles and acknowledged that he did great signs, they still did not believe in him
6. After his resurrection, Jesus would specifically appear to his half-brother James, and James would become the main leader of the church in Jerusalem and would write the Book of James; church history tells us his brother Judas also called Jude wrote the Book of Jude
7. After the resurrection, in Acts 1, they would be with Mary and the other disciples waiting in the upper room for the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, which would come on the Day of Pentecost
8. So God would cure them of their unbelief; BUT here, they did not yet believe in Jesus as Lord

C. Proof: They Came to Take Charge of Jesus

1. When they heard about his lifestyle, and the crush of the crowd and the fact that he would skip meals and sleep in order to heal people, they thought he was OUT OF HIS MIND; literally “outside of himself”
2. Or, as C.S. Lewis would put it, a “lunatic”
3. And they thought, “We need to save him from this crowd and really from himself”
4. They went to TAKE CHARGE of Jesus; same Greek word usually means to arrest a man... to seize him or lay hold of him
5. Involuntary commitment... for his own good, they believed

D. What About Mary?

1. Most commentators exempt Mary from this, although Jesus includes the word “mother” at the end
2. We don’t really know what Mary believed at this point; when Jesus was born, she knew full well what the angel had told her, and that she was a virgin; but the doctrine is infinitely deep, “Son of God, Son of David”... she pondered these things in her heart;
3. BUT others like John the Baptist and Peter struggled with their understanding and their faith along the way
4. So, I really don’t know what Mary understood at this moment.

E. Was Jesus a Lunatic?

1. No.
2. Jesus was the most sane man who ever lived. His teachings were stunningly beautiful, reasonable, clear, powerful
3. His demeanor was perfect... loving to broken-hearted sinners, bold with his enemies, rational at every moment
4. All you had to do was listen to him and you knew. At one point, some combined demon-possession with insanity:

John 10:20 Many of them said, "He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?"

But the evidence completely refuted that!!

John 10:21 But others said, "These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?"

III. The Jerusalem Scribes' Answer: Demonic Liar

Mark 3:22 And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, "He is possessed by Beelzebub! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons."

A. The Scribes (Teachers of the Law) Sent on Mission from Jerusalem

1. Jerusalem was the religious center of the Jewish nation
2. They had heard of Jesus and needed to make an official evaluation

B. Their Official Evaluation

1. They never deny that Jesus is doing stunning miracles
2. They accept that as a fact... the healings, the exorcisms... no one else in history had done such things
3. But they had already decided Jesus was their enemy; they had crossed swords very early in Jesus' ministry when he cleansed the temple in John 2 and did healings on the Sabbath, in direct defiance of their authority
4. By John 9, we learn that the Jewish leaders had already decided that if anyone said Jesus was the Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue... excommunicated from all Jewish life
5. But what explanation can they give for these miracles?
6. It is so tragic that they couldn't yield by faith to the most obvious answer... only by the power of God could Jesus do these works
7. Instead... they acknowledge his supernatural power to drive out demons, but ascribe it to the King of Demons, Beelzebub

Mark 3:22 "He is possessed by Beelzebub! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons."

- a. "Beelzebub" is a Jewish insult of the word "Beelzebul" which literally means "Lord of heaven"... Baal who rules in heaven; the Jews rejected that pagan god and mocked his name by calling him "Beelzebul" which means "lord of the flies"
- b. BUT that title came to mean Satan himself
- c. So... these Scribes were saying it is by the power of Satan that Jesus is driving out demons

C. Demonic Deception

1. A huge fraud

John 7:12 Some said, "He is a good man." Others replied, "No, he deceives the people."

Matthew 27:62-64 the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. ⁶³ "Sir," they said, "we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.'

2. They believed Satan was doing some vast trick through Jesus... driving out his own demons to deceive people
3. Jesus is a DEMONIC LIAR

D. Jesus' answer: That is IMPOSSIBLE!

Mark 3:23-26 So Jesus called them and spoke to them in parables: "How can Satan drive out Satan? ²⁴ If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵ If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. ²⁶ And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come.

1. This is a complex argument, not easy to follow
2. First of all, Jesus openly taught that Satan is a liar and the father of lies (Jn. 8:44)

3. Furthermore, he warned that false christs would come and perform false miracles to deceive the people (Mk. 13:22); later, Paul will openly ascribe the miracle-working power of the antichrist to Satan
4. So that Satan could actually do this kind of thing seems eminently possible
5. What then does Jesus mean? I think we have to understand the level of destruction he was doing to Satan's kingdom... he was driving out demons every single day, and rescuing people from darkness to light; he was wreaking havoc, laying waste Satan's kingdom... this was not some minor disturbance

1 John 3:8 The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.

6. So, the key to the answer lies in the level of destruction Jesus was working on Satan's dark kingdom

Illus. Imagine during World War II, a German general rebelled against Hitler and led a coup; he destroys a whole SS division, slaughtering thousands of fanatical Nazi soldiers and blows up Hitler's Berlin headquarters; he rounds up and disarms an entire German army and forces them to surrender to the Allies; he then wants to work with the Allies to bring the rest of the German troops still loyal to Hitler to surrender to the Allies; the level of destruction he has done to the Third Reich is proof... you can trust this man!

There is NO WAY this is just a trick, because Jesus is LAYING WASTE to Satan's kingdom!!

That's how this argument goes... if Satan drives out all his loyal henchmen and destroys their jurisdictions, his kingdom itself is ended

Mark 3:26 And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come.

E. The Right Explanation: A Vast, Powerful Rescue Operation

Mark 3:27 In fact, no one can enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he can rob his house.

1. Every sinner saved by Jesus Christ is a work of violence done to Satan's kingdom... Satan held those poor sinners in invisible chains of sin and death
2. Satan was the STRONG MAN... Luke makes it even more vivid

Luke 11:21-22 When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. ²² But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up the spoils.

3. Jesus severed those invisible chains and lifted the victims up and led them to freedom!!!
4. Our rescue was an act of triumph of the Lord Jesus Christ over his adversary, the devil... we were the devil's possessions; we were (in his mind) safely held, powerfully held, impossible to be rescued; Jesus is infinitely more powerful than this strong man, this evil tyrant, this dark Warrior King!

Colossians 1:13-14 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

5. That is what is happening with these exorcisms... these poor victims are set free

F. The Unpardonable Sin

Mark 3:28-30 I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. ²⁹ But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin." ³⁰ He said this because they were saying, "He has an evil spirit."

1. Jesus makes it plain in Matthew's account, you can't just say these things... such wicked statements are not free of charge
2. You are in danger of committing a sin that will never be pardoned, not in this age or forever

3. This is such a serious thing that it is worth diving in deeper next time!

IV. His True Family's Answer: Divine Lord

A. Jesus' Biological Family Arrived

Mark 3:31-32 Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. ³² A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you."

1. The text is clear who they are: his mother and brothers
2. They stood outside because of the huge crowd
3. They sent in a messenger to summon him

B. Inside the House: A Crowd of Disciples

1. They were sitting around him... meaning not merely pushing in on him for healing
2. They were delighting in his teachings
3. As we will learn in the next chapter, Jesus explained the parables and secret teachings to them privately when they were alone
4. These are true followers of Christ... Jesus knew what was in their hearts and how much they delighted in the message of the Kingdom of God

C. The messengers tell him: "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you"

1. It is a summons for him to stop this and come with them
2. Jesus refuses to stop his teaching ministry

D. His Answer:

Mark 3:33-35 "Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked. ³⁴ Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are

my mother and my brothers! ³⁵ Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."

1. Jesus is in no way being unkind to them
2. But he is challenging them to come up to the level of genuine faith
3. It is dishonoring to him for them to have these low thoughts of him... that he's out of his mind
4. BUT the fact was exactly the opposite... if they were as yet unbelievers, it is they who were out of their minds... sin is essentially insanity

E. Definition of the True Family of Christ

1. "Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother"
2. And what is God's will?

John 6:28-29 Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" ²⁹ Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."

3. Every believer in Christ as LORD, as GOD, is part of Jesus' true family

F. A Challenge to His Biological Family

1. Jesus is challenging them to come out of the fog of partial unbelief into the clear light of his salvation

When Jesus came to his hometown, with the people he grew up with, who were his relatives, he saw their unbelief

Mark 6:4-6 Jesus said to them, "Only in his hometown, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honor." ⁵ He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. ⁶ And he was amazed at their lack of faith.

2. It was time for them to repent and see him for who he really is

3. To acknowledge that he is actually their LORD, their GOD, their CREATOR and REDEEMER... that their biological, physical relationship with him will do them no good on Judgment Day

V. What Is Your Answer?

A. Today, we have looked at this complex passage

B. There is more to study next week about the unforgiveable sin

C. But the central issue is still before you... WHO DO YOU SAY JESUS IS?

1. What do you make of Lewis's trilemma? Jesus, the man who did all these amazing signs and wonders, also claimed to be GOD... he either is in fact divine Lord of heaven and earth, worthy of your worship... or he is not. If he is not, he cannot be a good moral teacher... he is either a demonic liar or a deluded lunatic
2. What is your decision? Your eternity hangs on it.