

## Why is Jesus worth following? Part 5

Mark 3:20-35

Pastor Tom

June 2, 2019

If someone were to ask you who was Jesus, how would you answer them? And would your answer have any impact on the way you live your life during the week? We can say that we recognize Jesus as Son of God. Believing in our minds that Jesus was Son of God is a good starting point. But it doesn't necessarily mean we're His followers or even Christians. Demons confessed the Jesus was the Son of God or the Holy One of God. They certainly weren't His followers.

But follower does sound kind of fanatical – weird, cult-like. We might be okay with affirming Jesus' identity and the good that He did and quietly follow Him. But we might like to hold back a bit when it comes to the "follower" label. We don't want to seem like crazy people. It's tough to be known as a devoted follower of Christ today. From silently laughing at us to openly despising us, a Christ follower does not walk an easy road. Surely Jesus allows for some respectable middle ground between the extremes of total rejection of him and devoted follower of Him? The middle would be a good place to live, wouldn't it? We could show respect to Jesus while still maintaining our image as a normal person to those around us. Surely Jesus would understand.

It seems we're not the only generation who have struggled with the degree to which we will follow Jesus.

CS Lewis, the author of the Narnia series, describes what it looked like to take some middle ground about Jesus in the 1950s. He came to Christ later in life after living as an atheist. In one place he talks about how some in his day tried to take this respectable middle ground approach towards Jesus. In *Mere Christianity* he writes:

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people say about Jesus: "I am 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 be either a lunatic—on a 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 patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> CS Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, (Macmillan, New York, 1952), 55-56.

I wonder if what we say we believe about Jesus and how we actually live has drifted towards this middle ground safe approach. The Gospel writer Mark addresses the same issues. Throughout the Gospel we have been confronted with the claims of Jesus and people's response to Him. Mark lays out his case that Jesus is much more than a good moral teacher. In fact, Mark claims that Jesus is actually the Lord God to whom we must submit. But is He worth it? We have been asking the question "Why is Jesus worth following?" By following, I don't mean trailing from a distance out of a curiosity. I mean living in total life devotion to Jesus.

So today we're looking for more reasons why Jesus is worth following as we pick up the story from the passage Sean preached on a couple weeks ago. Jesus has called the 12 disciples from ordinary walks of life to join Him on this good news mission. But not everyone is thrilled with Him. Today we're going to see opposition from an unexpected and expected source. The way Jesus responds to each of these challenges reveals more about Him. My prayer is that God will use His word to increase our faith and desire to follow Jesus as our Lord.

#### **Mark 3:20-35 (ESV) (Page 707)**

<sup>20</sup>Then he went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. <sup>21</sup>And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, "He is out of his mind."

<sup>22</sup>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." <sup>23</sup>And he called them to him and said to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? <sup>24</sup>If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. <sup>25</sup>And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. <sup>26</sup>And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end. <sup>27</sup>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.

<sup>28</sup>"Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, <sup>29</sup>but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin" — <sup>30</sup>for they were saying, "He has an unclean spirit."

<sup>31</sup>And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. <sup>32</sup>And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you."<sup>33</sup>And he answered them, "Who are my mother and my brothers?"<sup>34</sup>And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! <sup>35</sup>For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother."

Now just before we get into the story, did you notice something strange about it? **Did Mark forget his place in the story?** The passage starts off with this little paragraph about Jesus family in verses 20 & 21. Then Mark inserts this

whole section about the scribes coming down from Jerusalem and making this serious accusation against Jesus. Then in verse 31, Mark goes back to the story about Jesus' family. It looks like he got distracted while he was writing. He writes verses 20 and 21. Then someone shouts "Hey Mark, let's go throw the Frisbee." Mark goes out and enjoys Frisbee. Then he comes back puts in this section about the Beelzebul controversy. And when he gets to the end of that, he suddenly remembers that he didn't finish the story of Jesus' family thinking he was crazy. So he adds that on in verses 31-35. You could read directly from verse 21 to verse 31 and the story makes complete sense. So did he lose his place?

That's one explanation. But what if Mark did this intentionally? What if Mark saw an opportunity to insert something in the middle of the family story that would help the reader understand the magnitude of what just happened between Jesus and his family? Experts in this Gospel point out that Mark intentionally splits apart one story and into two pieces. Then he takes those two pieces like the bread pieces of a sandwich and surrounds another story with them. Why are these experts convinced of this? Because Mark does the same thing again and again throughout his gospel. So it's like Mark is saying to us "look at the story in the middle of the sandwich. That story helps interpret the story surrounding the middle story. So somehow the account of the scribes accusing Jesus of casting out demons by Beelzebul is related to the account of Jesus' family thinking He's crazy. So let's see if we can find out what's going on.

### **What happened in the story?**

Back to verse 20. Jesus and the disciples return to their home base Capernaum after ministering throughout the Galilee region. By this time, Jesus' fame has spread. People who have been healed have told others about Jesus' power, He can no longer go into towns publicly because of the crowds. But now He's back in Capernaum and word gets out. So crowds swarm Him and the disciples. It becomes so intense that they can't even eat. This could be for a couple of reasons. Either they can't even get to the dinner table for the food or there is no time for preparation of food because of the increasing demands of the crowds.

Somehow, word about this gets back to Jesus' family. So Mark tells us they went out to seize him. Not visit Him; not see Him, but seize Him. It's like they plan to do an intervention because they believe he is "out of his mind." But why? What is it about Jesus' ministry that would cause such a conclusion? Mark doesn't tell us. It could be that they had very good intentions. Maybe they thought Jesus was overwhelmed due to the stress and heavy demands put on him. What parent wouldn't be concerned about their child when they heard that? "He's so busy He can't even eat." Or it could be

that in an honor and shame culture such as that one, they were concerned about all the publicity this brought on the family. So maybe they ventured out to protect the family name. They may have believed things had gotten out of Jesus' control and they needed to save him. Either way, they set out to seize Jesus.

Then Mark moves to the other story starting in verse 22. Scribes come down from Jerusalem which was the religious center of Judaism. News of Jesus' successfully casting out demons has traveled to the highest religious authorities. So they send out this delegation from Jerusalem. But they don't go out to see if this is some phenomenon of God. They have already made their conclusions.

So the scribes declare "He is possessed by Beelzebul. By the prince of demons he casts out demons." The name Beelzebul comes directly from the Hebrew "baalzebu." If you've read some of the Old Testament, you'll know that Israel's neighbors worshipped the God "Ba al" or Baal. So "baalzebu" in Hebrew mean "Prince Baal." But the Jews mocked this name by adding a letter to it. They called Baal, "Baalzebub" which meant "Lord of the flies." Flies swarmed around dung heaps. Somehow, the original "Baalzebul" began to refer to Satan, the prince of demons. So the scribes do not deny that Jesus successfully casts out demons. But they claim He does it by the power of the devil. So notice in 2 verses, 21 and 22, 2 charges have been made against Jesus. His family thinks he's out of his mind. The scribes believe He's empowered by the devil.

Jesus addresses these charges – first the Beelzebul charge. After all, if you're making a case that you are the promised Messiah and king of Israel, it doesn't look very good on your resume that you're out of your mind and you work by the power of the devil. But Jesus is not threatened by these scribes. He simply wants to expose the illogical conclusion they have made.

So Jesus asks "how can Satan cast out Satan?" Then He uses very practical examples. Kingdoms divided against themselves cannot stand. Houses or families divided will not stand. If Satan casts out demons, he's working against himself. It wouldn't make sense for an evil being like Satan to release those he held captive.

But then Jesus goes further in verse 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." This is a parable of a home invasion of the strong man's house. The strong man is Satan. Jesus is the plunderer. He has bound Satan and plunders his goods or those held

captive by demons. Every time Jesus cast out a demon or released someone from demon oppression, Satan lost another one of his goods.

Here we discover our first answer today to the question **“Why is Jesus worth following?” He destroys Satan and releases Satan’s captives.** Notice this does not say “destroyed” as if Jesus finished Satan off. That ultimate destruction is yet to come. It says destroys because Jesus continues to destroy the works of the devil into our day. 1 John 3:8 states “Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.” Throughout His life, Jesus destroyed Satan’s work. Jesus resisted the devil’s temptations. He lived a sinless life so the devil had no claim against him. He released the devil’s captives. He defeated the devil when He went through with the cross. He continues to destroy Satan’s kingdom today by rescuing people living under Satan’s realm.

But why does this make Jesus worth following? **We get to live in the light of this good news.** I am encouraged when I think about Jesus destroying Satan and releasing his captives. Sometimes, it seems like Satan is still pretty strong. I wish I could see a little more clearly on this one. But maybe we’re looking in the wrong places. The advance of Christ’s kingdom over Satan’s will not make the news. But it happens in subtle or quieter ways – whenever someone repents and comes under the reign of Jesus; whenever someone comes forward to be baptized; whenever someone says no to the world and yes to the Lord in their thoughts; or in their actions; or in their words, Jesus is destroying the works of the devil.

This reality also encourages us to pray for Christ to continue to destroy Satan’s work in our society; in families and in our communities. We must pray against Satan’s work in the lives of loved ones and neighbors who don’t know Christ. Jesus can overcome even the hardest and darkest hearts. We can appeal to Him for protection from the influence of the devil and his forces. So Jesus is plundering the devil’s house and taking his goods.

But Jesus is not quite done with this charge from the scribes. He does not just let it go with some back and forth banter. He needs to expose the deadly consequence of believing the scribe’s claim. So Jesus says in verses 28 and 29 – “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 eternal sin.” That’s pretty severe. This is the so-called unpardonable sin which has caused some people deep personal distress. They wonder if they once committed it and can no longer receive forgiveness. But this context helps us define it quite clearly.

The scribes charged that Jesus cast out demons by the power of the devil. But in reality, Jesus cast out demons by the power of the Holy Spirit. So the scribes have indirectly labelled the Holy Spirit's work was actually the work of the devil. And they refused to believe that Jesus' ministry was from the Holy Spirit.

So according to Jesus their conclusion reveals some sort of deliberate resistance to the work of the Holy Spirit. They label the Holy Spirit's ministry satanic. This is high handed rebellion against God. It is a deliberate scorning of God's power. It involves persistent refusal to see what the Spirit reveals. We might think that Jesus is being too hard on the scribes. But by Jesus strong words, He reveals they didn't just make a mistake. They were so far from God, they declared that Holy Spirit's work was the devil's work. So I conclude from this that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit does not happen by a slip of the tongue when we're having a bad day. It is the result of persistent refusal to recognize the Holy Spirit's work and instead label it Satanic.

This warns us to be careful in labeling someone or something Satanic. We might easily dismiss the possibility of making such a charge against the Holy Spirit like the scribe did. But might we still move in that direction by attributing the some work of the Spirit today is actually the work of Satan. How could that happen? Well what if God decided to do something through the Spirit that was out of our comfort zone? One commentator writes this "It is a strange paradox that in any times of religious revival or obvious working of God's Spirit, it is often the religious leaders who oppose the work of God most strenuously, and seem to misunderstand it most willfully. This is because every person's danger of spiritual stumbling over Christ comes through that which they take to be their strong point, in which they pride themselves. The scribes were a living illustration of this truth. Their venomous remark was not a sudden outburst of anger, but a sustained attitude." We're asking God as a church to bring us new believers. What if God answers that prayer with many new believers and does it in a way we don't expect? Will we receive such a work of the Spirit or oppose it? I pray that God will help us see what He's doing and enable us to accept how He might do things that are different than our expectations. So that's the end of the middle story – the inside part of the sandwich.

The passage concludes with the wrap up of the story of Jesus' family. So we've just come through this very serious story of someone charging Jesus with ministry by the devil's power. Jesus has thoroughly exposed the charge as illogical and hard hearted towards God. But now His family shows up. They think they have His best interests in mind. They think they are there to help. So in verse 31, Mark tells us Jesus' mother and his brothers came and standing outside, they sent

to him and called him.” So they basically send a message inside the crowded house that they were outside. What would we expect a respectful son to do when his mother from out of town and his brothers show up outside of where he’s ministering? We’d expect Him to say to everyone that He’s got to take a break and go outside and see His family. Everyone would understand that. Everyone even in the crowd would expect that. In fact they tell him “Your mother and your brothers are outside seeking you.” It almost sounds like a mild rebuke doesn’t it. “Your mother and your brothers are outside seeking you.”

In that culture, blood family was your number 1 priority. But what does Jesus do? He asks the crowd “Who are my mother and brothers?” They’re all sitting there thinking “they’re outside. We just told you that.” Then he drops the bombshell. “Looking around 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.”

Jesus has just redefined the #1 priority of their entire people. He declares that spiritual kinship or bonds are stronger than family kinship in the kingdom of God. Jesus’ family no longer had first claim on Him. It was His spiritual brothers and sisters. Thankfully, Jesus’ brothers eventually came to believe in Him and stopped thinking that he was out of his mind. But at this moment they must have endured an incredible shock. Yet in making this declaration, Jesus broadened God’s family way beyond His blood relatives.

So here’s reason **#2 – Why is Jesus worth following? He welcomes anyone into His family who desires to do God’s will.** So he’s not talking about universal brother and sister hood of humanity regardless of whatever god they worship. Jesus’ family consists of those who desire to do God’s will. That requires a response in repentance and faith to Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom. It means to give your ultimate devotion to God as head of this spiritual family.

This is great news for those who have come from difficult family backgrounds. It’s also great news for those who are not insiders; for those who did not come from a Christian nation or have some sort of special relationship that will ensure they get a backstage pass to see God. Anyone can join Jesus family. All are welcome who desire to do God’s will like Jesus did.

Those of you who have had difficult family backgrounds do not need to let that define you. It’s part of your life experience. But Jesus invites you to join and belong to His family. Our church needs to be spiritual family to one another. We need to be family to those who have no family or those isolated from their families because of their faith.

But there's another aspect of God's family that challenges us. God calls us to release our blood or immediate family members to His call on their lives. So I think my struggle in this area would be accepting God's will that might move me or members of my family geographically away from me. Or if it required me accepting God's call on someone in my family to go into a risky situation to proclaim the gospel.

Some of you know we have a mission's presence in the West African nation of Cameroon. They've gone through a tremendously difficult time of civil strife where many have been killed and villages burned. There were questions about whether we would pull our missionaries out. But they decided to stay with their Cameroonian brothers and sisters who couldn't get out. So far, they have been protected and things may be easing.

But in one of the updates from the field director, Cal Hohn, I thought he made a very penetrating insight. He noted how North Americans can almost idolize safety. We want everyone to be safe, don't we? We want kids to be safe. And of course that's a natural parental and family instinct. But might we elevate the safety of our family above the call of God on their lives? Where would we be if Jesus played it safe and stayed home in Nazareth? Jesus' going out cost Him His life. It cost Mary her son. If we/I elevate safety above doing the will of God, we might end up being at odds with God.

This seems to be Mark's point in wrapping the family story around the Beelzebul story. If we just had the family story, we might just conclude it was a little misunderstanding. But placed here we see the danger of trying to derail God's plans because of our own family concerns.

Yet there is so much good news in this passage.

Jesus is destroying the devil and releasing the devil's captives. So keep praying for this work and trust Jesus' to empower you to resist the devil in your own life AND Jesus welcomes anyone into his family who desires to do God's will. You don't have to come from a certain background or tribe. You are welcome if you desire to do God's will. If you have not accepted Jesus' call to join His family, today is the day to join in. You may have looked for family your whole life. But in Jesus and in God the Father, you will find the family where you truly belong.

Jesus said the time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent or turn away from a life going away from God. Turn to God and believe the good news of Jesus' coming. I pray that what we say we believe about Jesus will actually be true and part of our everyday lives.