

"Here Are My Mother and My Brothers!"

What do people think of you? How would they identify you? How would they describe you? They might talk about your profession, "He's an IT Manager for Dell." They might talk about your family, "She's a single mother of three children." They might talk about your character, "She's really funny," or, "He's a little strange." People judge you by all sorts of criteria. Part of that criteria is how you present yourself; your words and your actions say something about who you are as a person. People also judge you based on their own values and convictions. For example, some people will look down on others who value different things than they do. But such judgments of others are not all morally neutral. Neither is the way we identify ourselves to the world. What we do and say exposes our values and convictions. And how others' judge us reveals their own values and convictions. Our identity and others' perception of it, is not always morally neutral. Our identity is important.

This is an issue that is raised in our passage for today with regards to Jesus. People were wrestling with who Jesus is. We see in this passage different perspectives on Jesus. They were trying to identify him. They were trying to figure him out. They were analyzing his words and actions and coming up with a judgment about who he was. Was he a mad man? Was he someone who was well intentioned but had bit off more than he could chew? Was he demon-possessed? Or was the Messiah, the very Son of God come to the world to declare God's will to mankind? This passage shows that we must all confront this question. There will be different answers that the world gives, but they are not all morally neutral. Jesus can't be a liar, lunatic, and lord all at the same time. His identity is a crucial question. It is a life-changing question.

You see, your perspective of Jesus is crucial for your own identity. As we study this passage, we'll see that our own identity is defined by how we identify Jesus. And if Scripture defines us by how we identify Jesus, then we ought to speak and act in a way that is consistent with that definition. If God's word identifies us in a certain way as believers, then we ought to live our lives in light of that identity.

So let's look at what this passage says about Jesus' identity, and then we'll consider how that relates to our identity. We'll begin by looking at all the wrong perspectives that people had about Jesus in this passage. Notice the first wrong perspective in verses 21-22. It says, "Then the multitude came together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread. But when His own people heard about this, they went out to lay hold of Him, for they said, 'He is out of His mind.'" Recall our last sermon in Mark from two weeks ago. We had seen that people had been coming to Jesus from all over, from even beyond the borders of Israel. Jesus had been attracting a large following, and then in verse 21 we read that once again a crowd had gathered. This crowd was so big that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. That's when we see the first wrong perspective of Jesus. Some who the text describes as "his own people" were saying that Jesus was out of his mind. They were saying that he was insane. This phrase, "his own people", was actually a colloquial phrase, and it could refer to either his relatives or friends. The point is that people who actually knew Jesus personally, became concerned about him. This was probably genuine concern. Think about it from their perspective. They might have known Jesus all his life or for a long time. All of a sudden he begins his ministry and he starts attracting large crowds flocking to

him. Then there is news that starts to surface that the religious leaders from Jerusalem are concerned about his teachings. And then the crowds become so overwhelming that Jesus isn't even able to eat; in other words he is not even able to take some of the normal care for himself that one might normally do. These relatives or friends probably had some genuine concern for Jesus. They very well may have been genuinely concerned for his mental state. Jesus' behavior and actions were not those of a normal, everyday person. But of course, we know that Jesus was not just an ordinary person. He was on a mission to proclaim the coming of the kingdom. And yet from the perspective of these relatives or friends, Jesus had been identified falsely as out of his mind.

A second wrong perspective on Jesus' identity is somewhat similar to the first. It appears at the end of this passage in verses 31-35. In those verses, we see Jesus' mother and brothers come to him and the crowds, calling for Jesus. They too seemed concerned about him. They obviously know him personally. We are not told explicitly how they identify Jesus. The text doesn't equate them identically with the friends or relatives who thought Jesus was insane, though it also doesn't rule that out. Rather, the sense you get from the text is almost a bit of uncertainty among Jesus' mother and brothers. Notice that they don't appear to be there to follow Jesus or to listen to his teaching. They seem to be there to come get him. Maybe the other friends or relatives had been coming to Jesus' mother and brothers, sharing their concerns about Jesus with them. Maybe they felt compelled to go find Jesus, to get him away from the crowds, and to bring him home. We don't know for certain what was going on in their minds. But we do see Jesus' response in verse 32 to the word that his mother and brothers were calling for him. He points to his followers, probably the twelve disciples, and maybe others, and says that *they* are his mother and brothers. In other words, Jesus contrasts his earthly mother and brothers with those who were with him, learning from him and following him. This is a foil to his earthly mother and brothers. They had not come to follow Jesus and learn from him. That is the problem with their identification of Jesus. Whatever uncertainty they had about Jesus' identity, whatever they don't say about Jesus' identity, their actions speak louder than their words. They had not come to learn from Jesus, they had come to call him back to them. Though they may not have said anything negative about him, they certainly don't positively identify Jesus here either.

A third wrong perspective on Jesus' identity is found in between these other two perspectives, in verses 22-30. Here we see the scribes' perspective on Jesus. These other two perspectives by those closest to Jesus, his family and friends surround this perspective by the scribes, tying all the perspectives together in this passage. Clearly this third perspective is the most horrific. The scribes basically believe that Jesus is demon possessed. And yet as horrible of an assertion that is, the fact that this perspective of the scribes is put alongside these other wrong perspectives by Jesus' family and friends, should warn us of the danger of *any* wrong perspective on Jesus.

But let's look further at this wrong perspective by the scribes. In verse 22 the scribes make two assertions about Jesus. First, they say he has Beelzebub. The term Beelzebub originally referred to a Philistine deity, but by this point had become to be used to describe the ruler of demons, in other words Satan. And so basically, they are saying that Jesus is demon possessed. They are saying that he is possessed by Satan. The second assertion they make is that he casts out demons by the ruler of demons. So they basically say, that because he is possessed by Satan, the ruler of the demons, he is then going around casting out the other demons by the name and authority of Satan.

These assertions by the scribes might strike you as odd and irrational, and that is basically how Jesus responds. In verses 23-26 Jesus responds first to their accusation that he is casting out demons through the power of Satan. Jesus says that this is irrational. He says that neither a kingdom nor a house can stand if it is divided. Think about these examples. For example, think about civil wars - if a kingdom or nation is engaged in a civil war, then they are not able to stand up against external threats. Even nations that are hotly divided politically have trouble making progress. Or think about a household. If a husband and wife will not walk in agreement, it wreaks havoc on a home. Any child who has witnessed a divorce can tell you that. Jesus applies this to Satan. He says that if Satan were casting out his own demons it would mean his certain down fall. Basically, Jesus says that is irrational to think that Satan would do something like that.

In verses 28-30 Jesus then responds to the scribe's accusation that he is demon-possessed. And at this point the conversation gets pretty serious. He begins in verse 28 with a solemn declaration. In the NKJV it says "assuredly". The actual word in Greek is "Amen." Jesus says, "Amen, I say to you." This is a classic way Jesus in the gospels starts out when he has something important and serious to say. He then goes on to describe what we refer to as the unforgiveable sin. Jesus says that all sorts of sins and blasphemies can be forgiven of mankind, but he says that there is one sin that will not be forgiven, which he calls blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. And in verse 30 he basically identifies that as what the scribes were doing, claiming that Jesus had an unclean spirit, basically attributing the work of the Holy Spirit in Jesus to the devil. The scribes, who were students of God's Word, should have recognized the Spirit's work in Jesus. They should have recognized the exorcisms he was doing as a sign of the kingdom of God intruding into history. And yet, out of the hardness of their heart, they persisted in unbelief and instead rejected Jesus, attributing his power to the devil instead of to the Holy Spirit.

Now it's common when people read about the unforgivable sin that they wonder, oh my, have I committed this sin? Have I sinned the unpardonable sin? Well take comfort in the fact that if you are really concerned about that, then that is proof that you have not committed this sin. Remember, it is the Holy Spirit himself who works faith and repentance in our hearts. We only have true faith and repentance in our heart if the Holy Spirit has worked this in us. The Holy Spirit doesn't work this in those who have committed the unforgivable sin. The very nature of this unforgivable sin is a conscious and informed hardening of the heart against the work of the Holy Spirit. So, if you are truly worried that you committed this sin, that is a sign that the Holy Spirit is working inside you. If you had committed this sin, you wouldn't give it a second thought.

And yet the seriousness of this sin shows that our identification of Jesus is very important. This doesn't mean that every wrong view of Jesus represents the unforgivable sin. Certainly not! Look at the Apostle Peter. He denied Jesus three times, even cursing while doing that, and he was forgiven. Look at the Apostle Paul. He persecuted Christ and the church, and he was forgiven. So don't get hung up on worry about if you committed the unforgivable sin. Instead, put your energy into something more constructive, namely, how ought we to rightly identify Jesus? What should our perspective be on who is Jesus? Who is he? What did he come to do?

We see that answered, at least in part, in our passage. Jesus describes his own mission in a parable in verse 27. He says, "No one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. And then he will plunder his house." Jesus is describing his mission in terms of his battle with the demonic forces of Satan. You see in this parable, Jesus is countering the

wrong perspective which the scribes had by telling them what he had come to do. Jesus is not an agent of Satan, he is actually battling Satan. He has come to conquer Satan. Jesus has come to take back from Satan many who have fallen prey to his deceptions. And so Jesus describes his ministry in this parable about binding a strong man before plundering his house. He's saying, if you are trying to take something from a strong man, you can't do that as long as the strong man can get in your way to stop you. A homeowner is not going to help a burglar, he is going to resist him. The analogy here is that Satan is this strong man. He is exercising control in this world over people, tempting them and leading them astray. That is what Satan did in the Garden of Eden. That is what he continued to do through human history. And so part of Jesus' mission is to conquer Satan. He is going to bind him and plunder from him. He is going to free and liberate souls who have been enslaved by sin and the devil. That is what his exorcisms represent. Whenever Jesus casts out a demon, we are seeing an intrusion of the kingdom of God! Mark's gospel began with Jesus overcoming Satan's temptation in the wilderness. Jesus stood up against all sorts of temptations all his life in faithful obedience to God. All of these things were victories over Satan. All of these were attacks against the enemy.

And this attack came to a climax on the cross. When Satan himself thought he was striking out against Jesus, it is then when Jesus had the greatest victory. It is then when he dealt a decisive blow to Satan. There are a number of benefits which Christ achieved on the cross, but one of them can be put in terms of "conquest". On the cross, Jesus was victorious over Satan. That is what Genesis 3:15 says, where God is speaking to Satan, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel." The first prophecy of our salvation in Christ was put in terms of the conquest of Satan.

Now Satan has been cast out of heaven in the words of Revelation 12. Though Satan and the demonic forces still are active in this world and still seek to persecute us, there is a real way in which Scripture shows that he is bound and constrained at this time. And of course, we look forward to the end when Christ will cast Satan into the eternal lake of fire, where he is not only bound, but done away with permanently, never to afflict God's people again (Rev. 20).

And so this perspective of Jesus and his mission is a right perspective. It is one way in which Jesus describes who he is and what he has come to do. He is the Messiah who has come to conquer Satan and liberate God's chosen people. Jesus came to set people free from their bondage to Satan, sin, and death, and to proclaim liberty in Christ. This is a right perspective and identification of Jesus. And clearly some in our passage were already beginning to take on a right perspective of Jesus. For in verse 34 it says, "And He looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him, and said, 'Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother.'" Those who were forming a right perspective of Jesus were those who were sitting at his feet; following him; and learning from him. And as they were learning from him, they were learning about God's will and beginning to live that out. This is the right response to knowing the true Jesus. We must follow him, learn from him, trust him, and seek to obey him.

You see as we come to have a right perspective on who Jesus is, it demands a response. Because as we come to understand the true identity of Jesus, it affects our identity. That's what we see in this passage. In this passage, people are questioning Jesus' identity. The passage shows different perspectives on this question on who is Jesus. Yet, at the end of this passage, when we get to his faithful followers, we see that the question is reversed by Jesus. At the end of

this passage, the question is no longer about who Jesus is, it's about who everyone else is. Jesus asked in verse 33, "Who is my mother and my brothers?" And then he pointed to his disciples and followers. Jesus turns the question around in terms of identity and calls us to consider our own identity. But notice he is calling us to consider our identity in relationship to himself; which of course brings us back to the first question. Who we are, depends on who we see Jesus as. This is a question of our relationship to Jesus. If you see Jesus as Lord and Savior, then you have a new identity. If you see Jesus as your Lord and Savior, then he says to you today, "behold, my brother, and sister, and mother." Regardless of what others may say about you, what can be greater than the Lord Jesus Christ saying, "I know you." "You are my friend and kinsman." "You are my own." That is the greatest identity we can have, and we only have it by knowing Jesus and who he truly is, the Lord and Savior and the world.

And so saints of God, as those who have found your new identity in Jesus Christ, I exhort you to do the will of God. As verse 35 says, Christians are to be following God's will. And yet, how can we do this without the Satan conquering power of Christ in our lives! But praise the Lord, that if we are in Christ, then we have that power. The very power that binds Satan is the power at work in our lives; it is the power that transform us; that changes our hearts and grow us. It is this power which makes us love God's will. And so if we have such a new identity as those who are Christ's, and if we have such power, how can we continue in any allegiance to Satan? If we have been liberated from Satan by the kingdom power of the Holy Spirit, how can we still give aide to the enemy who has oppressed us? No, we must not continue in our old ways. We must no longer live as those identified with Satan and sin. We must live as those who have been set free by the blood of Christ! We must walk in God's will. That means delighting in the things that God delights in, and hating the things that he hates. It means walking according to his laws he has set forth in his word. That is what Christian liberty and freedom really is. Before we were set free, we couldn't follow God's laws - we were slaves to sin. Now we have been set free so that we can freely follow and obey God's will.

And as you strive to do this, it will change other's perspective of you. As you find your identity in Christ and his identity, it will shape how others see you. If you identify with Christ, if you relate to Christ, don't be surprised that others think of you in the ways they thought of Christ. Those closest to Jesus thought that he was "mad". The scribes thought he was from the devil. Others maybe were uncertain of him. We shouldn't be surprised if similar things happen to us, when we identify ourselves to the world as Christians. Our friends and family might think we are crazy - that we have become religious fanatics. Or they might worry about us, thinking maybe we've joined a cult or been brainwashed. Others who are seen as religious leaders in the community might label us as intolerant because we actually hold to what the Bible says, the bible which says that the only way of salvation is through Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12). Many Christians have experienced this. I've seen friends ostracized from their family because they became Christians.

Don't be surprised when this happens. It happened to Jesus. Jesus said it would happen to us. Jesus said in Matthew 10:34-39 "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will be those of his own household. He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. And he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it." This may seem like harsh

words from Jesus, but he is speaking from the perspective of being in a spiritual battle. We are in a spiritual war between the forces of darkness and the forces of light. Those who have been liberated in Christ, those who have found their identity in Jesus, will be at odds with those who still find their allegiance with Satan. It's not that they hate us, per se, it's that they hate Christ. If you do not see Christ as Lord, then you see his message as intolerant and condemning. And so we who continue to bring his message to the world are seen in the same way by those who reject Christ.

And yet, though some of us have experienced this ostracism from the world and from our friends and family, isn't the more common reality that we don't experience this? Why is that? If the world hated Jesus, and had all sorts of wrong perspectives of him, how come we don't experience that more ourselves, if we identify ourselves with him? Well I think that the reality is that we so often try to minimize our differences from the world. We try to minimize what we believe. We so often strive to go unnoticed. We strive to be politically correct. We strive to say things in ways that won't offend people, tippy-toeing around the truth, lest we offend someone. We try to present ourselves in ways so that people won't think that we are Jesus Freaks. We strive to do anything to not "turn people off" from our faith.

Now don't get me wrong - I'm not saying that we should go out of our way to offend people. The true gospel is not about how well we can offend people. But the fact is that when Jesus presented his message and ministry that it did offend many people. It did divide him and his followers from others. And Jesus has told us that as we are faithful to proclaim his message, then that same sort of response is to be expected.

And so I would call us to all wholeheartedly embrace our new identity and our new family! If we are identified with Christ, we are part of Christ's family. We all become adopted children of God. And so embrace that identity. Identify yourself to the world in that way, regardless of the cost. Don't be surprised if the world rejects you, for as we've seen today, the ultimate battle is a spiritual one. As we identify ourselves with Christ and take up his name, we realize that we are getting ourselves involved in a spiritual war. We have taken on the very battle which Christ was engaged in! The question then becomes: Will you go out in your own strength? Or by the power of the Holy Spirit who deserves all honor?

Lastly, be encouraged that the victory is certain. Christ's victory was in one sense declared on the cross. That was the decisive blow against Satan. Now we are just consolidating the kingdom. For everything that we do here and now is in light of Christ's promised return. He has promised to return and that when he does, he will bring to final destruction Satan and all God's enemies, once for all. May that certain hope and victory encourage you as you serve. May that you give you peace even as the world and Satan persecute you. Amen.

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