

The True Family of Jesus

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[0 : 0 0] Well, I've got a mate called Dave. I studied with him in Aberdeen and he has got a peanut allergy. And it was discovered when he was a baby, he had some peanuts or something with traces of peanuts.

And as soon as he swallowed it, he just flared up and went bright red. And his parents panicked and took him to the doctor. And ever since then, he's carried with him an EpiPen or an adrenaline pen.

Because if he eats peanuts, he'll go into anaphylactic shock. And he never had a severe reaction. He never used his pen until one day when I was eating ice cream sundaes with him in St Andrews.

And after double checking with the manager about his ice cream sundae, making sure that there were no peanuts or traces of peanuts on his sundae, we both sat down together and got stuck in.

But almost immediately, he had an allergic reaction. And so he rushed to the toilet to spit out what he had just swallowed. And then I went in after him. His throat was swollen like a frog, red.

[1 : 0 2] And his face was bright red. And he said to me he was struggling to breathe as he tried to spit into the sink. But he'd never used his adrenaline pen before, so he didn't know where he should actually stick it.

And as he worried about what would happen if he stuck his pen in, he thought the biggest thing that would happen would be he'd wet himself. And I said, just need to stick your pen in.

But he said, well, you just hang on here because there was Boots the Chemist next door. So he ran in to ask the pharmacist if she could help him so he would know what to do with his pen. And then back to the scene in the ice cream shop, I looked at my ice cream sundae and I just thought, well, he told me to wait here, so whilst I wait, I'll just finish my ice cream sundae.

And I finished it and still no arrival or appearance of Dave at all. So I looked over the counter, the desk, table, and could see his ice cream sundae. I thought he's not going to want that, so I'd be ashamed to waste it.

So I ate his ice cream sundae as well. And then I started to worry because he still hadn't come back. I didn't know where he was. And eventually I caught up with him in the St. Andrews Cottage Hospital, lying in a ward in his boxer shorts, bright red, swollen body, smiling.

[2 : 1 8] So I was relieved that he was actually okay after this incident. But what happened was that he had this severe reaction, an extreme reaction to peanuts.

And he only actually discovered that I did eat his ice cream years later when my son Joshua told him that's what happened. But I was just amazed at how such a small trace, tiny trace of peanut oil, I think it was, on his ice cream sundae, had such a massive reaction and impact on him.

And so what we see here, this is the connection, when we look at Mark chapter 3, we see how Jesus causes an extreme reaction in the people that he encounters.

And it's always extreme. You notice that in all the Gospels, that whenever Jesus encounters people, or they encounter him, the reaction is always an extreme one. Nobody's ever neutral when it comes to Jesus.

People are either for him or they're against him. And it's actually still the same today. People are, when they really understand Jesus, they're for him or they're against him. Any kind of contact with Jesus or with the message of Jesus, the good news of Jesus, the Gospel of Jesus, any kind of contact will cause an extreme reaction in a person.

[3 : 34] And so that's what I'd like us to look at this afternoon. And we're going to look at this passage under three headings. So the first is the extreme reactions against Jesus, verse 20 to 22. Secondly, the explosive responses by Jesus, verse 23 to 30.

And then thirdly, the essential requirements of Jesus, verse 31 to 35. So extreme reactions against Jesus, explosive responses by Jesus, and then essential requirements of Jesus.

So first of all, the extreme reactions against Jesus, verse 20 to 22. And there are two extreme reactions. The first is from the family of Jesus, and the second is from the religious authorities.

And what Mark does here, he brings them together in a sandwich. Not a cheese sandwich or a tuna sandwich or a BLT, but a sandwich where there are two stories, and the story's split, and there's something in the middle.

So it's a literary technique that Mark often uses. Scholars call it interpolation or incalcation. I prefer sandwich. Because it's basically a story that's broken in two, and inside that story is inserted another story.

[4 : 46] And the two stories come together, and they make a point. So if you look down, you can see in these verses, verse 20 to 35, there's this heated discussion with the religious authorities.

That's verse 22 to 30. It's in the middle. And it is sandwiched between the reaction of Jesus' family, verse 20 and 21. And then it comes back to Jesus' family at the end, verse 31 to 33.

And so they all come together to make a point about the true family of Jesus, the true family of Jesus. So let's just have a look at the first slice of bread. So first of all, 20, 22, the family of Jesus think he's mad.

Let me just read those verses again. Then Jesus entered the house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, He is out of his mind.

That's the first extreme reaction to Jesus. He's insane. He is mad. He is out of his mind. Now, everywhere that Jesus went, a massive crowd tended to gather.

[5 : 54] Jesus was so popular here that he didn't even have time to stop for lunch. And yet his family aren't impressed by his behavior. They thought he'd lost the plot. They didn't understand what Jesus was doing.

And so what they wanted to do was to take control of Jesus and restrain Jesus. They wanted to stop him doing what he was doing. Well, what was he doing? Well, he was fulfilling his mission in this earth.

He was doing God's kingdom work. And so what his family do is they insult him and they dismiss him as being mad. Actually, it's incidents like this that point to the historicity of the Gospels.

Because if you were making this stuff up about Jesus, then there's no way you'd include this kind of thing. If you wanted to persuade people to believe in Jesus, you would never record that his family thought that he was an absolute nutter.

And yet clearly that is what they thought. And so we'll come back to his family later on, verse 30 to 35. But Mark now switches focus away from his family who think he's mad onto the religious authorities who think he's bad.

[7 : 08] That's in verse 22 and 30. So 22 sums up, and the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, he is possessed by Beelzebul, by the prince of demons.

He is driving out demons. So the big guns come from Jerusalem and they give their verdict on Jesus. They accuse him of being possessed by Beelzebul, the prince of demons.

So Beelzebul is just another name for Satan or the devil. And they're claiming that the devil, Satan, is the source of Jesus's authority. Essentially, what they're saying is that Jesus is evil.

And so if he's evil, he shouldn't be listened to. And that's the second extreme reaction to Jesus. So both are different. His family misunderstand him and think he's mad.

The religious authorities are hostile towards him and they think he's bad. And both of them, both groups, want to stop Jesus from doing his kingdom work. And so we'll see Jesus's response in a moment.

[8 : 10] But it's actually worth highlighting that these reactions to Jesus, extreme reactions, still exist today. Because when people are forced to encounter Jesus, and when they get the real Jesus, not some kind of made-up Jesus of their imagination, but the real Jesus as we find him in the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, then people will just dismiss him as being mad or being bad.

Some suggest he's mad, he's a lunatic who was just delusional. Others will say he's bad, he's a liar who is trying to deceive people. And yet when you step back and you consider everything that Jesus did in his life, his words and his actions, what you discover is that is not the life of a mad, delusional lunatic or a bad, deceptive liar.

Listen to what one theologian says, John Gerstner. He says, So an extremely action to Jesus, which people have, actually tells us more about us than it does about Jesus.

And so we need to be careful, especially if you're here today and you wouldn't call yourself a Christian, need to be careful that you're not biased towards Jesus. You need to be careful that you haven't just dismissed him because you don't understand him.

We need to see who Jesus says he is. And that's what Jesus does here. That's what he reveals next. So first point, these extreme reactions against Jesus. Second point, the explosive responses by Jesus.

[10 : 24] Verse 23 to 30. What Jesus does here is he shows just how absurd the religious authorities' verdict on him is. So let's take it from verse 23.

So Jesus called them over to him and began to speak to them in parables. How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand.

And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand. His end has come. This is the first time that Jesus has spoken in parables, in Mark.

And so Jesus responds to them saying that he's working with Satan by asking, how can Satan drive out Satan? Because if Satan was driving out demons, then he'd be fighting against himself.

And that's why Jesus says if a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And from history, we know that civil wars destroy countries. From the present day, we know how division weakens a kingdom, whether it's Brexit or whether it's Scottish independence.

[11 : 31] It's destructive. It divides people. And so Jesus is saying, if a house is divided against itself, it just won't stand. And so he's making the point that if Satan is at war with himself, his kingdom will self-destruct.

And so it's ludicrous and it's illogical to suggest that Jesus is possessed by Satan when he is driving out demons. But that being said, Satan is strong and Satan does have a kingdom.

That's why Jesus says this strange thing in verse 27. In fact, no one can enter a strong man's house without first tying him up. Then he can plunder the strong man's house.

What does he mean when he says that? Well, a strong man here is Satan. Satan, the strong man's house is like the world, which is dominated by Satan, where people are held captive to Satan.

And so Satan needs to be defeated so that people can be set free. And Jesus is saying that's what he came to do. Jesus said he came to bind the strong man, that is Satan, because Jesus is the stronger man who came to plunder Satan's house.

[12 : 45] And so we shouldn't miss the explosive nature of what Jesus is saying here. It was explosive to the religious authorities who were listening to him. Because what Jesus is saying in verse 27 is actually a summary of the whole of human history.

So humanity has been captive to Satan, to sin, to death and evil as a result of what the Bible calls the fall, the fall of humanity.

And we read about the fall at the beginning of the Bible in Genesis. So at the creation, humanity, represented by Adam and Eve, enjoyed a perfect relationship with God in a perfect world.

And yet the serpent, Satan, the snake, came and tempted Adam and Eve and they disobeyed God. And as a consequence, the relationship with God was broken. And then every other relationship was broken as well.

And yet amidst this devastation of a fallen world, fallen and broken relationships with God, God made a promise to the serpent.

[13 : 50] So way back in Genesis chapter 3, verse 15, this is what he said. He said, I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers. He will crush your head and you will strike his heel.

So God was saying that there would be this continuing struggle between humanity and Satan. But a mightier one would come, a serpent crusher would come to destroy the serpent, to destroy the devil.

And Jesus is the serpent crusher. So Jesus is saying here, verse 27, I'm the one who has come to bind the strong man. I will defeat Satan. I will plunder his house.

I will liberate the captives. And I will renew this broken world and fix things and sort things out. Well, how is that going to happen? Well, the battle that would take place would be at the cross, which is where Jesus knows he is heading.

That's where Jesus would overcome Satan, where he would save his people, where he would restore our broken relationship with God and where the beginning of the renewal of the world would start.

[15 : 00] And so the one stronger than Satan would actually give up his power to suffer and die, to pay the penalty for our sins so that someday God could destroy all evil without destroying us.

And so this is an explosive response to these religious leaders who would have realized the audacity of what Jesus was saying here. And so the true significance in Jesus driving out demons wasn't that he was working with Satan, but he was actually working to destroy Satan because he was going to defeat him.

And so Jesus' binding of Satan means that he can grant forgiveness of sins. And that's the connection between what Jesus has just said and the next explosive statement, which follows in verse 28 to 30.

Let's just read those verses again. He said this because they were saying he has an impure spirit.

So the big question is, well, what's the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit? What is the eternal sin that Jesus is speaking about? Well, to understand it, I think we need to get the context.

[16 : 22] And the context here is Jesus outlining just the incredible scope of the forgiveness that he gives. So he's saying there's no sin, there's no blasphemy beyond Jesus's authority to forgive.

So what we're being told is Jesus offers forgiveness to anyone who has sinned in any way. And that's the radical nature of Christianity.

No matter who we are and no matter what we have done, we can be forgiven because of what Jesus Christ has come to do for us.

And that's what sets Christianity against and apart from every other world religion. Where every other religion or philosophy or worldview will say you worked hard, you try your best.

And if you're good enough, then you'll be accepted, then you'll be saved. And yet Christianity is saying you can't ever be good enough. And yet no matter what you've done, you can be forgiven.

[17 : 29] But Jesus says there's one thing that can never be forgiven and it's blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. So what Jesus says here is part of this whole episode where the religious authorities think that Jesus is working for the devil.

And so Jesus said this about blaspheming against the Holy Spirit because they were saying, verse 30, he has an impure spirit. So let's think about this.

Jesus came as God's agent of salvation. Jesus came to save. That's what Christmas is all about. The meaning of Christmas is Easter. Jesus came into this world on a mission to rescue and to save.

And so when Jesus came, Jesus had God's spirit dwelling within. That's why he was able to carry out all these amazing exorcisms of demons and healing of people and raising the dead and controlling the weather.

Jesus was acting with God's authority because he had God's spirit, because he was bringing God's kingdom. And yet the verdict of these religious authorities was that Jesus had an evil spirit.

[18 : 35] And so to equate Jesus with Satan was to blaspheme against the Holy Spirit. So saying that what Jesus did was evil when it was actually God's kingdom work meant that these religious authorities were guilty of this eternal sin.

So their rejection of Jesus cut them off from the possibility of forgiveness with God. And so in summary, I'd suggest that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is to regard the work of Jesus as being demonic.

In origin, essentially, it is to reject Jesus Christ. And so if we as people willfully and stubbornly set ourselves against Jesus, if we think we don't need him and we don't want him, then we can't be forgiven.

And yet if we respond to Jesus and we do go to him for forgiveness, there is no need to worry about whether we have blasphemed against the Holy Spirit or committed this eternal sin.

Okay, thirdly and finally, as we close, first, the extreme reactions against Jesus. Second, the explosive responses by Jesus. And third, the essential requirements of Jesus.

[19 : 52] Here we get the second slice of bread, if you like, in Mark's sandwich, because now he returns to Jesus's family. Verse 31 to 35. So what's the point of sandwiching these two episodes together?

Well, it seems that the attempt to restrain Jesus from his mission by his family is as mistaken and blasphemous as equating Jesus with Satan.

And so here, Jesus' family, as well as the religious authorities, completely misunderstand Jesus and they misunderstand why he came.

And so we return to the family of Jesus at the end here, because we're told what it means to belong to the true family of Jesus, what it means to follow him.

So just notice here in these verses how Mark says twice that Jesus's natural family were on the outside. They're on the outside.

[20 : 55] So he describes it, whereas the true family of Jesus are sitting around Jesus on the inside. So Jesus is not saying that his natural family aren't important, but he's defining what it means to be part of his true family.

And it didn't come from natural relationship. And it didn't come from religious affiliation. That's not what makes people part of the family of Jesus.

Because Jesus says, whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother. Verse 35. So the true family of Jesus includes anybody from any part of history, from any part of the world who does God's will.

And so as Jesus sat looking at those in front of him at the time, he was looking beyond to a much bigger, greater family that includes people like you and people like me.

And so the problem with Jesus's natural family and with the religious authorities was that they wanted Jesus to listen to them. And they wanted to control him.

[22 : 07] But because of who Jesus is, we're the ones who've got to listen to Jesus and let him control us. And it's as we do that, listen to Jesus, live under his authority, that we then begin to resemble the family likeness.

You know, when you belong to a family, there's always a family likeness. You just tell when you meet somebody's children who their parents are. Sometimes anyway, most of the time. In fact, when we lived in Edinburgh, I went to a school show that Joshua was in.

And the teacher who was organising the school show said to Matthew, who's Joshua's younger brother, she said, oh, you must be Joshua's small brother because you look just like him.

And she was right. And then she said to me, oh, you must be Joshua's dad because you look like both of them. And I replied, well, hopefully they'll grow out of it and they'll look different when they're older.

But you can see here, if we belong to the family of Jesus, if we're his, then we will look increasingly like him. Our lives will be reflective of the Jesus we see here in the Gospels.

[23 : 18] So people should be able to look at us. If we profess to be a Christian, they should be able to look at our lives and our language and know that we belong to the family of Jesus.

Because if we're obeying God's will, as Jesus says, verse 35, then shouldn't it be obvious who we belong to? We're part of a different kingdom. We belong to a different family than the kingdom of this world.

So Jesus came to earth as God's king to rescue us from Satan's kingdom, to bring us into his family. So through his death and through his resurrection, Jesus has defeated Satan and sin and death to make us his own.

And so the only proper reaction to Jesus is to trust him as our saviour and as our Lord. So his family thought he was mad and the religious authorities thought he was bad.

But Mark wants us to see that Jesus is Lord God. Mark chapter 1, verse 1. And they're the only options we get. Just listen to how C.S. Lewis puts it in his book, Mere Christianity.

[24 : 29] He says, You must make your choice.

So the option that Lewis says is that you don't get, is to say that Jesus is a great human teacher.

And yet that's what most people in Glasgow, or most people in the secular West, would want to choose. People would like to see Jesus as a wonderful teacher of love and peace and justice and all the rest, because that's the version of Jesus that will never actually threaten our lives, and that you can keep at a close distance and you can somewhat control.

Because that kind of Jesus will never offend you or offend our culture. And yet that was never an option for the people who encountered Jesus at the time.

Never an option. They never said he's such a great teacher. And so that's why the things Jesus said, the things that Jesus did, mean that he could never be domesticated down to the level of just being a teacher.

[26 : 05] People regarded him as mad. They regarded him as bad. Or they saw him as God. And they fell down and worshipped him. And yet most modern people just won't want to concede that Jesus Christ is the unique son of God.

Because what that means is, if he is God and if he is king, then I must bow to his lordship. That means that he's got to take the steering wheel and sit in the driving seat of my life.

And I've got to follow him. I've got to fit in with him and his way. I can't expect him to fit in with mine. And so we're forced to choose. Because if we're not for Jesus, it's very clear that we're against him.

If we don't see him as lord, then we're actually guilty of high treason. And if we don't see him as saviour, then it's clear that we can never be forgiven.

And if that's the case, then we just exclude ourselves from his true family. And so the question is, how have you responded to Jesus? Are you on the inside?

[27 : 13] Are you with him? Are you listening to him? Are you obeying his will? Or are you on the outside? Are you for him? Or are you against him? Because there's nothing in between.

We have to choose. So how do you respond to Jesus? Jeb.