

The Book of Mark
Jesus: Liar, Lunatic, or Lord? (Part 1)
Mark 3:20-35
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To anyone who has studied the Gospels and done it honestly, with integrity, there really is no question that Jesus of Nazareth claimed to be God. William Robinson writes, “If one takes a historically objective approach to the question, it is found that even secular history affirms that Jesus lived on earth and that He was worshiped as God. He founded a church which has worshiped Him for nineteen hundred years.”

But the question is, were His claims and are His claims to be God, legitimate? In the passage that we come to in Mark, we will find that when it comes to those claims, there are only really three basic alternatives. The first alternative is (when you think about His claims) is that His claims are false. The second alternative of course is that His claims are true. If His claims are false, then there're two options that grow out of that: either His claims were false and He knows they're false when He makes them, or His claims are false, and He doesn't know that they're false. And of course if His claims are true, then He is everything that He claimed to be. Now when you look at those three options - His claims are false and He knows, that means He was an evil man. He was a demonically inspired liar because He claimed to be God Himself. If His claims are false and He didn't know that they were false, He was deluded. He was on the level of a lunatic, a mad man, self-deceived, having a messianic complex that wasn't true at all. If His claims are true, however, and if He is all He claims, then He is nothing less than Lord. Those, folks, have been and always will be the only options for the claims of Jesus Christ to be God.

Last time when we studied Mark together, we saw Jesus choosing the twelve out of all of His disciples so that they could be His official representatives. Mark doesn't record the next major event in Jesus' life. The other Gospel writers do. It was the Sermon on the Mount - the most famous sermon Jesus ever preached. There were a number of other significant events in Jesus' life that Mark skips over. He skips immediately from the calling of the twelve, to one of the longest, most significant days in Jesus' life and ministry. When you put the three synoptic accounts together - you remember the word “synoptic”. You'll hear me use that from time to time. **It** comes from two words - “syn”, together, and “optic”, to see - “to see together.”

There're the three Gospels, the three of the four Gospels, that sort of record the same events in similar ways. That's Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the synoptics; shorter way than saying Matthew, Mark, and Luke. So, when you hear me say that, that's what I'm talking about: all the Gospels except for John. When you put the accounts in the synoptics together, on that one day in Jesus' life, these are the things that happened. In the morning there was the healing of a demon possessed man. He was teaching at a home in Capernaum. There was an accusation against Him by the Pharisees that He was in fact in league with Satan. That same day, He taught all of the parables of Matthew thirteen, all of those kingdom parables, and then in private later explained them to His disciples (or several of them). They took a trip across the Sea of Galilee during which Jesus falls asleep. And now you understand why He fell asleep on that day. And a storm comes up, in the midst of that trip across the sea, and Jesus calms the storm. But His day is not done. When they get to the other side, on that same day, He heals the demoniacs in the area of the Gerasenes including the one, you remember, called Legion. And the demons leave this man and his cohort and go into the pigs which rush into the sea and drown. All of that on one very long day.

The reason the Gospel writers, I think, really focus on that one day is because on that day, a couple of most important events in Jesus' ministry occur. A couple of turning points, if you will, in Jesus' life and ministry. In the morning of that day, Jesus healed a demon possessed man, and the response that the leaders give to Him marked a huge turning point in what would happen in the future of His life and ministry. In fact, turn there with me because I want you to see this. This plays into the passage we're going to look at in Mark. Look at Matthew 12:22. This is really how the day began. "Then a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute was brought to Jesus, and He [Jesus] healed him, so that the mute man spoke and saw. All the crowds were amazed, and were saying, 'This man cannot be the Son of David, can he?'"

So, understand what happened. That morning, Jesus heals a man and it's such a dramatic change in this man's life that the people began to say, 'What if? What if this is the one? What if this is the Messiah?' And the religious leaders respond in verse twenty-four. We're going to look at their response in more detail Lord willing next week in Mark 3. In addition, on that same day, Jesus' family members really show their true colors, their true perspective on Jesus' claims. And

this is in Mark 3. We're going to look at it in just a moment. Mark captures, for us, all the drama of these two pivotal turning points on that longest day of Jesus' life in all their color. We're going to look at them together. Remember, Peter, who was providing Mark with all this information, was there. He saw it all. He was an eyewitness and it's an amazing account. Let me read it for you. Mark 3. Mark 3, beginning in verse 21: And He [Jesus] came home, and the crowd gathered again, to such an extent that they could not even eat a meal. When His own people heard of this, they went out to take custody of Him; for they were saying, 'He has lost His senses.' The scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, 'He is possessed by Beelzebul', and 'He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons.' And He called them to Himself and began speaking to them in parables, 'How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. If Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but he is finished! But no one can enter the strong man's house and plunder his property unless he first binds the strong man, and then he will plunder his house. Truly I say to you, all sins shall be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin' - because they were saying, 'He has an unclean spirit.' Then His mother and His brothers arrived, and standing outside they sent word to Him and called Him. A crowd was sitting around Him, and they said to Him, 'Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are outside looking for You.' Answering them, He said, 'Who are My mother and My brothers?' Looking about at those who were sitting around Him, He said, 'Behold My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother.'"

In amazing clarity Mark, the Gospel writer here, reminds us that every person who reads his record must make a choice of what to do with Jesus. What to do with Jesus' remarkable works and His remarkable claims. And they're always the same choices. Whether you're talking about people in the first century or today, you must make a choice: is Jesus a lunatic? Is He a demonic liar? Or is He in fact the Lord He claimed to be? Those three options are laid out in the passage I just read in your hearing.

Now, the structure of this passage is very interesting. It's the first time Mark has ever done this,

but it won't be the last. In a wonderful, sort of storytelling technique, he starts one story, interrupts it with another, and then returns to complete the first story. He does this on a number of occasions from this time forward. It's kind of a "meanwhile, back at the ranch" sort of approach. **In verses 20 and 21**, Jesus' family leaves to come to Capernaum. Verses 22-30, the Pharisees attack Jesus there in Capernaum. And in verses 31-35, Jesus' family arrives at the house where He's teaching. All this happens on one morning of one day. What's remarkable about this story is that in those three scenes, we are brought face to face with those three responses to Jesus' works and claims.

Tonight, I want us to look at the first possible response. It's the response that He must be out of His mind. He is a deluded lunatic. Look at verse 20. It says, "And He came home, and the crowd gathered again, to such an extent that they could not even eat a meal." After a number of ministry activities that aren't recorded **in Mark's Gospel**, in between the calling of the twelve and this event, Jesus and the disciples come home, come home to Capernaum.

Just as a reminder of where this is happening - I'm not going to spend all that time here because we've talked about this before - but this is the land of Israel. On the northwest side of the corner of the Sea of Galilee is where Capernaum is located - where the arrow was pointing. Here is a picture taken ~~from~~ of that corner of the lake, and Capernaum is over there where you see the red circle. You can still see the ruins, and to give you a little closer picture, there is an ancient synagogue built shortly after the time of Christ, but on a foundation of the synagogue from the time of Christ. That blue building you see adjacent to it is a Catholic church built over what is almost certainly (there are a few sites you can say this about in Israel) almost certainly the house of the Apostle Peter, there in Capernaum.

Now, they come to a home; we can't be sure whose home it is. Like in 2:1, it may be the home, however, of Peter and Andrew. If not, it was a home that someone had loaned to Jesus in Capernaum. This is the excavations there. The black arrow is pointing to the ancient synagogue, and the red arrow is pointing to a portion of the ancient, restored church built over Peter's original home. Here is a picture of what's left of under that church, of Peter's, the original structure. Those inside bricks are part of the original structure of Peter's home. It may have

been there, or it may have been a home, at a home that one of His followers had allowed Him to use. But Jesus gathers and again in, like in chapter two, as soon as Jesus arrives back in His hometown now of Capernaum (undoubtedly tired, undoubtedly ready for rest) a crowd immediately gathers again. And this time there was such a large crowd, and the ministry was so intense, that there isn't room. Not only is the access blocked, but there isn't even room for the disciples to make time to eat, to get out of the crush and the crowd. That, by the way, is an artist's reconstruction of what Peter's home may have looked like in the first century: multi-compartmented, with areas to meet and for him to teach. By the way, this problem of Jesus not having any place...any time to eat a meal was a common one, a normal occurrence for Jesus and the twelve. Later in 6:31, He says to His disciples, "'Come away by yourselves to a secluded place and rest a while.' (For there were many people coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat)". So, they were so put upon by the people, so busy in ministry, that they didn't have time to eat.

Verse 21 says, "When His own people heard of this." Now before we go any further, we need to answer the question, who are 'His own people'? It's a strange expression and what does it mean? What does Mark mean by 'His own people?' It's interesting, because in the papyri...you remember, I told you, I spent six of my favorite months of life translating papyri in seminary. And papyri are simply ancient documents that were thrown away, written on...from the papyri, made from the papyrus reed, paper made from the papyrus reed that grew along the Nile River. It was pressed together, the reed was cut in thin slices, pressed together and that was a writing surface. And in the ancient world when they were done with those, they threw them in their trash heaps. Because of the low humidity and so forth in certain parts **of** the lands of the Bible, those documents remained and were preserved. And now, archaeologists have recovered them. I have a couple of books in my library of papyri, where I can see how various words in our New Testament were used in secular Greek writings - in letters, and title deeds, and all kinds of things like that. In the papyri, this word, this expression 'His own people' is used of agents or representatives. It's used of friends or associates, or it's used of family, kinsmen, people of one's own household. So, which is it used here to mean? Well, because whoever these people are in verse 21, they are leaving wherever they are to go to Jesus. And then on the same long day, Jesus' mother and brothers arrive looking for Him down in verses 31-32. The most likely

meaning of His people or 'His own people', in verse 21, is Jesus' immediate family. Most commentaries accept that, and those who don't, trip over it because they can't imagine Mary participating in this. (And we'll talk about Mary in a moment. I think that's a separate story). So, this passage then, is talking about Jesus' mother Mary and His brothers.

Now, maybe you don't know about the rest of Jesus' family. We've talked about it briefly before. Jesus' immediate family is described over in Mark 6. Flip over a couple of pages. Mark 6:2 says, "When the Sabbath came, He began to teach in the synagogue..." This is His hometown, verse one says. So, He's in Nazareth. He's gone back from Capernaum, back to Nazareth for a visit. And when the Sabbath came, He began to teach in the synagogue. "...and the many listeners were astonished, saying, 'Where did this man get these things, and what is this wisdom given to Him, and such miracles as these performed by His hands? Now watch verse three. Here we learn about His family. These are the hometown crowd: small little town, probably less than five hundred people. "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and the brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?' And they took offense at Him." Now, when you look at that verse, you can note several things about Jesus' family. First of all, He had four brothers and they're all named here. Also, you'll notice that He had at least two sisters. We're not told how many sisters, but it's in the plural. So, there were at least two. That means that Jesus grew up in a family of at least seven siblings. And if He had more than two sisters (which typically that would be true in a family of four brothers, but not necessarily) at least then, seven siblings growing up together and maybe more if He had additional sisters. If Joseph, Jesus' father, had died after Jesus' pilgrimage to the temple when He was twelve, but before Jesus began His ministry (as it appears in the Gospels) then it would have fallen on Jesus as the oldest person in the home to have been responsible (the oldest man, that is, in the home) He would have been responsible to teach His younger siblings the Scripture. That responsibility of course is outlined in Deuteronomy 6 - a passage we'll look at some point in detail.

Can you imagine what that would have been like? Here is this family: there's Mary; Joseph now has died; Jesus is becoming an adult, before His ministry begins, through His late teen years and into and through His twenties, and He is responsible for this family. He's a carpenter, according

to verse three. He's working as a carpenter, and He is teaching these younger siblings who have been born, the scripture. We don't know at what point Joseph died. Obviously, there was some time that passed because of the number of kids **that** are included here, but at some point, Jesus became responsible for them. No family could've ever had a better teacher, a more consistent example, a more perfect model of God the Father than that family had. Here's the amazing thing though: whenever it was that Jesus' siblings first became aware that their older brother claimed to be more than human, they all refused to believe Him.

Now, note again **back in** 3:21 it says, "When His own people heard of this [His family, His brothers, along with Mary], they went out to take custody of Him..." Here's how they would have gotten there. These are some roads through Israel. The ridge route is the blue line that cuts across the central ridge. And then there was a road that cut through to Capernaum that was called the International Highway. It was a major road, and you can see if you look **just** to the left of the arrow, you can see the city of Nazareth. It was close by Capernaum. They would've hopped on this International Highway and gone up to Capernaum. It went right through Capernaum. It was a distance of about twenty miles, about five hours brisk walk. So maybe they started out early, early that morning, and they walked to get to Capernaum to take custody of Jesus.

Now the question is, what did they mean? What does this mean to "take custody"? Well, Mark uses this same Greek word in several other places for "arresting someone." In fact, a number of other places. They came to *arrest* Jesus. Jesus' brothers left Nazareth and went to Capernaum some five hours journey away, to arrest Jesus and to restrain Him for His own good. Why? Well, verse 21 tells us. "For [because] they were saying, 'He has lost His senses'." The Greek word that's translated "lost His senses" means "to be mad, to be crazy." In 2 Corinthians 5:13 Paul, speaking of how he's often treated, says, "If we are beside ourselves [if we are outside of our self, if we are out of our mind], it is for God; if we are of sound mind, it is for you." It means to be out of your mind. So, Jesus' own brothers, His younger brothers that He had helped raise, have concluded that He is out of His mind - crazy, delusional. By the way, the verb tense here for "saying" implies that this conclusion had been discussed and repeated often. In the months Jesus has been in His ministry, these brothers have been talking about it again and again.

And they have come to the conclusion again and again, repeated to each other, He is out of His mind. What is He thinking? What is He doing? He has lost His mind. He's not thinking or behaving rationally. He is unbalanced.

Now the question immediately comes, why would Jesus' brothers have concluded this about Him? Well, think for a moment about some of the things that they have seen transpire. There were certainly many possible explanations but let me just give you a few to think about. What about His becoming a rabbi without any formal training, and then gathering so many disciples around Him? What about His constant fighting and opposition to the religious leaders of the nation? He's already been in several public confrontations with the Scribes and the Pharisees in Galilee. This is not usually how someone who wants to rise in leadership responds. What about His authoritative teaching? That's going to make the people in His hometown mad **in a** short time after this encounter. What about His audacious personal claims, like back in 2:7, where Jesus claims to be able to forgive sins as if He were God Himself? What about His choice of companions and associates? Think about it. Good Jewish boy raised in a good Jewish home hangs around a bunch of tax collectors and sinners. And then He chooses a rag-tag odd assortment of fishermen, political zealots, and tax collectors to be His students. It's a bit odd, don't you think?

There are other reasons. Certainly, Jesus' actions and teaching often confused even His disciples, even those closest to Him. I mean Luke 9:45 says, of the disciples, they did not understand the statement. They did "not perceive it; and they were afraid to ask." Luke 18:34, "The disciples understood none of these things, and the meaning of... [the] statement was hidden from them, and they did not comprehend the things that were said." John 12:16, "These things His disciples did not understand at the first; but... [after Jesus was raised and] glorified, then they remembered that these things were written of Him." So, they were often clueless themselves and they were closest to Jesus. Certainly, those who were more distant had to wonder, what was He doing? What did He mean?

But all of these may have contributed, but the primary reason is here in the text. It's here in the context of the verse that we're looking at. The primary reason is in verse 21: "When His own

people heard of this, they went out to take custody of Him.” When they heard that Jesus was constantly ministering to the crowds with no thought, no consideration for His own needs, they came from Nazareth to take Him back to Nazareth by force. In other words, they had concluded that His religious zeal had crossed the line and had become fanaticism. They were of the mindset that, listen, you know, religion is good thing if it’s kept in its place. These brothers were to some extent religious. Later in Jesus’ life, we find them going down to Jerusalem for one of the feasts, as the Old Testament had required of all Jewish males. But Jesus has just taken His zeal for God too far. He’s become a religious fanatic. They had heard that He was staying up all night praying, not taking time to eat, traveling all over Galilee teaching and preaching. One commentator writes (R.T. France): “Jesus’ people back home have heard reports of the rowdy scenes in Capernaum, and they decide that it’s time to take Jesus in hand for His own sake and for the family’s reputation.” France goes on to say that, “This is a more explicit rejection of Jesus’ ministry by His family than anywhere else in the Gospels. This is not simply a failure to follow Jesus, but a positive and offensive repudiation.”

Now the question comes, what about Mary? Why is Mary involved in this? What was Mary’s part? Well, William Lane writes: “It is unnecessary to think that Mary also suspected that Jesus had lost His grasp on reality. Her presence with Jesus’ brothers indicates that her faith was insufficient to resist the determination of her sons to restrain Jesus and bring Him home.” But I think John Broadus’ explanation is perhaps best. He says, “Maybe Mary was sometimes perplexed, just as John the Baptist was on occasion.” You remember? John’s the one who baptized Him and says this is the one, the dove descends, and later he sends to Him and says are You the one? Because some of what Jesus did just didn’t seem to make sense. It didn’t seem to match. Broadus goes on to say, “Perhaps Mary sometimes became perplexed by her son’s pursuing a course so widely different from what she, in common with other Jews, expected of the Messiah. And in this frame of mind, she could more easily be prevailed upon by the brothers to accompany them without fully sharing either their view or their purpose.” She’s concerned about Jesus. She loves and is concerned about His health. They think He is out of His mind. So, Jesus’ family, then, determined that He was self-deceived and deluded.

By the way, their attitude didn’t change in the months that followed. If you fast forward to about

six months before His crucifixion, you see this same sort of disdain for Jesus. Turn over to John 7. John 7, and I won't go through this whole passage with you, but basically Jesus is deciding whether or not to go down to the feast because the Jews are trying to kill Him, and the Feast of the Booths was near. Verse 3: "Therefore His brothers said to Him, 'Leave here and go into Judea, so that Your disciples may also see Your works which You are doing. For no one does anything in secret when he himself seeks to be known publicly.'" Here you get a little insight into what their thinking is going on with Jesus. "If You do these things, show Yourself to the world." Now, just in case you think I'm reading something in that isn't there, John gives us this commentary in verse 5: "For not even His brothers were believing in Him." Six months before His crucifixion, his brothers say, 'Alright, if You really are who You claim, if You really are doing the things You say You're doing, You need to go to the feast. You need to make Yourself known, and everybody will buy into it. The leaders will buy into it. You won't have the opposition and the resistance You're having now.' They did not believe.

By the way this explanation, that Jesus was not fully in touch with reality, caught on. Turn over a few chapters to John 10. John 10:19. Jesus has just said something else profound as He talks about Himself as the Good Shepherd. Verse 19: "A division occurred again among the Jews because of these words. Many of them were saying, 'He has a demon and is insane. Why do you listen to Him?' Others were saying, 'These are not the sayings of one demon-possessed. A demon cannot open the eyes of the blind, can he?'" So, there's this debate going on, raging about is He or is He not out of His mind? Really amazing, isn't it? Amazing to think that Jesus' own brothers came to this conclusion about Him.

What does this tell us? What are some of the implications that we can learn from this passage? Let me just think these through with you, just a couple of things. First of all, as Jesus' followers, we too will often be thought of as nuts, as delusional, as lunatics or, to use a phrase that's common today, as part of the lunatic fringe. It was true of in the first century of Jesus' followers. If you look at Acts 26:24, you remember Paul finishes giving his little speech there before Felix and Festus, and Festus says what? "Paul, you are out of your mind!" Your much learning has made you mad. In 2 Corinthians 5:13, Paul champions the words of some of the people there in Corinth about him, and he says, 'Alright, maybe I am out of my mind, but if I'm out of my mind,

it's out of my mind for your sakes.' This was an accusation **in** the first century. It's also been an accusation throughout church history. You have Athanasius, who stood *contra mundum*, that is, "against the world", fighting for the deity of Christ. You have Luther in the Reformation. R.C. Sproul has an excellent chapter in his book, I think it's in *The Holiness of God*, on the insanity of Luther, thought insane because he stood against all the political and church leaders of his day. By the way folks, this is still true today. Don't look now, but if you pick up the newspaper, if you read anything written by the intelligentsia of our world, by the highly educated in our culture at some of the most prestigious institutions in their graduate schools, they think just this of Christians - they're nuts, they're out of their mind, they're part of the lunatic fringe. Now, there are times when I feel that way about some people who call themselves Christians as well, but we all get painted with the same brush. Understand, this will happen. This will happen. If they called Jesus out of His mind, don't be surprised if people you know, people in your family, people in your extended circle, people in the school you attend, the graduate school you're a part of, at work, sort of look at you askance as you walk by. 'There goes one of those religious nuts'. If they treated our Master that way, we'll get treated the same way. Remember what I said earlier, as we were studying Ephesians? The minds of the world are darkened. We are the sane ones living in an insane asylum. Don't ever forget that.

Another implication is that if you are serious about your faith, if you're really zealous for God, if you try to live by the Bible, even unbelieving family and friends will come to the conclusion, as Jesus' family **did** with Him, that you are taking this Bible stuff way too far. It's okay to be involved a little. It's okay to have a little dose. That's good probably for business, maybe good for your family. But don't go too far! There're probably people in some of your lives who've expressed just this. This is what Jesus' family was saying about Him, 'He's become a religious fanatic. Let's go take Him home. He's out of His mind.' Don't be surprised if this happens to you as well.

Thirdly, understand that this is one of the most common rejections of Jesus Christ and His claims. This is the person who says, and you've probably met some who says, 'Jesus was a good man. He lived an extraordinary life - incredible dedication, extreme devotion to what He believed - and He meant well. But He had simply come to the wrong conclusions about Himself

and His mission. This is really the conclusion that Albert Schweitzer came to in his book *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*: a good man with a messianic delusion. Some of you are familiar with this book written last century. Listen to what Albert Schweitzer wrote: “There is silence all around. The Baptist appears and cries, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Soon after that comes Jesus, and in the knowledge that He is the coming Son of Man, lays hold of the wheel of the world to set it moving on that last revolution which is to bring all ordinary history to a close. It refuses to turn, and He throws Himself upon it. Then it does turn and crushes Him. Instead of bringing them eschatological conditions, He has destroyed them. The wheel rolls onward, and the mangled body of the one immeasurably great man who is strong enough to think of Himself as the spiritual ruler of mankind and to bend history to His purpose, is hanging upon it still. That is His history and His reign. A good man with a bit of a delusional purpose crushed by a world gone wrong.”

There’s one huge problem with this theory about who Jesus was: good men never claim to be God. Christ, Himself, made this point. Turn over to Mark 10. Mark 10 and look at verse 17. “As [Jesus] was setting out on a journey, a man ran up to Him [this is the rich young ruler] and knelt before Him, and asked Him, ‘Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’” Now watch what Jesus says to him. “Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone.” What is Christ saying here? He’s saying, ‘Listen, if you are not ready to acknowledge that I am who I claim, God of very God, then don’t call Me good because only God is good.’ So, Jesus doesn’t leave us with that possibility. He cannot be both God, or excuse me, He cannot be both good and not God.

There’s a fourth implication that grows out of this text. This episode teaches us the power of God, it confirms Jesus’ claims for us, and it reinforces the reality of Jesus’ resurrection. Six months before Jesus’ death, in spite of living with Him and growing up with Him at home - hearing His teaching, hearing of His miracles - his brothers did not believe. Something amazing happens. In 1 Corinthians 15:7 we learn that, on the day of Jesus’ resurrection, shortly thereafter, “He appeared to James, then to all the apostles.” In fact, look at Acts 1. You got to love this. Acts 1. After the ascension (Jesus has just ascended into heaven) they go back (all of His disciples that are there in Jerusalem). Verse 12: “Then they returned to Jerusalem from the

mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, just a Sabbath day's journey away. When they entered the city, they went up to the upper room where they were staying..." And then it lists who was there and it lists, of course, a number of the Apostles. Verse 14: "These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers." Within forty days of His resurrection, they had become believers in their brother to be all that He claimed to be. They'd ministered on His behalf. 1 Corinthians 9:5, Paul uses them as an argument for wanting to have or having the right to having a wife if he would so desire. "Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas [Peter]?" James actually became the leader of the Jerusalem church and writes the very first New Testament book. In chronology, the first book written was James. Judas writes the New Testament letter that bears his name: Jude. And I want you to look at both. Turn over to James one with me. I want you to see this. I love this. James 1:1: "James, a bond-servant [slave] of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ [Messiah]." The sovereign Messiah, Jesus. Jude does the same thing as he begins his little letter. Jude 1: "Jude, a bond-servant [slave] of Jesus Christ." And he can't even bring himself to call himself a brother of Christ, so he just says, 'I'm the brother of James, a slave of Jesus our Messiah.'

What produced the change? What happened? You could say, well, it's the resurrection. And of course, in a sense, that's true. But make no mistake. There were many who knew about Jesus' resurrection who never believed in Him. The Jewish leaders knew, remember? And they covered it up along with the Roman soldiers. They knew. They saw it. They witnessed it personally. So why did Jesus' brothers believe? Listen carefully. This is a powerful point from Jesus' brothers in the lesson we've seen tonight: because of sovereign grace alone. These men didn't come to faith in Christ because they grew up in a home with godly parents, because they saw a perfect example, because they heard the truth taught and explained by the world's greatest teacher, because they knew Jesus and knew about His claims, because they saw Him perform miracles. They didn't come to call Him Lord because they lived with Him for at least twenty years. They didn't call Him Lord because they saw Him resurrected. Remember what Abraham told the rich man in Luke 16? He said, your brothers won't believe even if someone rose from the dead. So why did they finally believe? I want you to see James' explanation. Look over at James 1. Here's the answer. I love this. James says here's why. James 1:18: "In the exercise of

His [God's] will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.” James understood that God is sovereign in salvation in a way that you and I will never experience. He lived in the same home with Christ yet rejected Him until God chose to grant him life. I don't know why God chose, in His providence, not to bring James and his brothers to faith earlier, but I do know it makes a powerful illustration of the deadness of the human heart and God's power when He chooses to exercise it.

Listen, folks, Jesus' brothers experience should motivate you to pray for the salvation of those you love who don't know Jesus Christ, because only God can bring their dead hearts to life. It should motivate you to share the Word with them since James says it was the “word of truth” that God used to bring him to life. And don't ever lose hope about that person in your life who doesn't believe, even after years of sharing the Gospel **with them**. Perhaps it's your spouse. Perhaps it's a child, a parent, a family member, a friend, a co-worker. If God can save Jesus' brothers after all those years of living with Christ, hearing Him teach, and yet rejecting Him, even thinking He was out of His mind - God can save anyone. This episode with Jesus' brothers makes it clear that God is sovereign in salvation. Isn't this true of us? “In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth.” That's the lesson of those who thought Jesus was a lunatic.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank You so much for this amazing account. Lord, it staggers us to think that the human heart is so sinful, that those men could live with the Son of God and reject Him. But Father we thank You that You are so powerful, and that Your love is so sovereign, that You could reach into their dead hearts, their Christ rejecting hearts that called Him crazy, and bring them to life so that they end up writing books in our New Testament. Father we thank You for Your power in their life and for Your power in our lives as well. Don't let us be ashamed of Christ. Help us to remember that if they treated Him that way, we'll be treated that way as well. And help us to do it with joy, knowing that our reward is great in heaven. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen!