

The Book of Mark
Jesus: Liar, Lunatic, or Lord? (Part 2)
Mark 3:20-35
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Well, we come tonight back to the Gospel of Mark and to an amazing passage of Scripture. I have just been personally amazed at the stark contrast between the choices that are ours about the claims of Jesus Christ.

Let me remind you of the context, briefly. After Jesus' appointment of the twelve to be His official representatives on earth (we saw in chapter three, beginning in verse thirteen and following) Mark skips forward. He skips a lot of things that happen in the ministry of Christ, including His most famous sermon and a number of other activities, and he skips forward to one of the longest, most significant days in Jesus' life and ministry. The three Synoptics together record that, on that one day, all of these things transpired: Jesus healed the demon-possessed man in the morning; He taught at a home there in Capernaum (probably Peter's home); an accusation was made against Him by the Pharisees that He was in fact in league with Satan; He teaches, on that day, all of the parables that are in Matthew 13; He explains several of them privately to His disciples back in the house; they take a trip across the Sea of Galilee, during which, because of the busyness of the day, He falls asleep; a storm comes up, He calms the storm; and then when He and the disciples arrive on the other side, He heals the demoniacs (and of course you know that one of them is famous, Legion); and the demons go into the pigs and they rush into the sea. All of that on a single day.

And during the morning of that day, several very important events occur, and those events are recorded for us in Mark 3. Let me read for you again what Mark writes, beginning in Mark 3:20. It says: "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.'"

Now, as you can see from just that reading of the text, this passage breaks into three scenes. The first scene in the first two verses. Jesus' family leaves Nazareth with the mission of heading to Capernaum to bring Jesus back to Nazareth. In the middle section, verses 22-30, the Pharisees attack Jesus on that same morning that His family leaves to bring Him home. And then at the end of the passage, the closing section, the closing scene, verses 31-35, Jesus' family arrives at the house where He's been teaching; and Jesus, in the context of that, makes some very remarkable statements.

Now, what's remarkable to me about this section and this one story, really woven together into a single story, is that in those three scenes we are brought face-to-face with the only three possible responses to Jesus' claims to be God. And they're always the same choices. I reminded you of them last time. Either His claims were false and, as you can see on the left-hand side of this chart, if His claims are false then either He knew they were false, in which case He was a hypocrite and a liar of the worst order, or His claims were false and He didn't know they were false, in which case He was sincere, but He was a sincerely deluded lunatic. The only other possibility, and it really is the only other possibility, is that His claims were true. He knew them to be true, and He is in fact the Lord of Glory, God incarnate. What Mark wants us to see, by

weaving those three choices through this passage, is that every person who reads his Gospel, every person who reads this section, must make a choice as to what to do with Jesus' remarkable claims. We are forced to answer the question, each one of us, which group do we belong to?

Last time we saw the response of Jesus' brothers. Even though they'd grown up in the same home with Him, they concluded that He was in fact a deluded lunatic. Verse 20 says, "And He came home, and the crowd gathered again, to such an extent that they [He] could not even eat a meal. [And] when His own people heard of this..." The most likely meaning here of "His own people" refers to Jesus' own immediate family, especially his four brothers. And Mary comes along, as we mentioned last time, probably not **believing** that He was some sort of a deluded lunatic, but concerned about Him - He's not eating, wondering what's going on, confused (even as John the Baptist, who knew who Jesus was, later in the ministry of Jesus was confused and sent word: 'Are you the one we're to be expecting?'). So there was confusion because Jesus wasn't living up to what they expected the Messiah to be and to do. But in Jesus' brothers' case, they came to take Him. Verse 21 says, "...they went out to take custody of Him." The word "to take custody" is used in a number of places in Mark's Gospel - "to arrest." They went out to arrest Jesus. They left Nazareth - went the several hours journey to Capernaum - to bring Jesus back, by force, to Nazareth. Why? "...for they were saying, 'He has lost His senses.'" He's lost His mind. He's not thinking or behaving rationally. He's unbalanced.

But before Jesus' family can get from Nazareth to Capernaum to take Him home, for His own sake and for the sake of the family's reputation, an even more troubling accusation than insanity is leveled at Jesus. And this accusation comes from His enemies. The religious leaders accuse Jesus of being a demonic liar; a demonic liar. This second part of the story unfolds in and just outside the home where Jesus is teaching in Capernaum. Possibly, it's Peter's home there. We just don't know for sure. But **let's** march through this second scene in the story. Jesus' family - now you have to understand what's happening. Jesus' family has made the decision. They're heading to Capernaum from Nazareth. They're coming to get Him. They arrive later on this same day while He's still teaching in the same house. But, in the meantime, something else transpires. There are some false accusations made against Jesus. Notice 22. "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.’”

Notice, first of all, this group that we haven't yet met. These men are new to the story. They're described as "scribes who came down from Jerusalem." We know who the scribes are. We've already met them. It was the group in Israel who were specialists **in** copying and in teaching the Law. They were mostly Pharisees, and Jesus had already encountered this group but not *this* group because, notice, these scribes are described as those "who came down from Jerusalem."

Now, that's an interesting phrase by the way. If you've ever been to Jerusalem, that phrase makes...excuse me or to Israel...that phrase makes sense because Jerusalem, while it is south of Galilee, where Jesus is, it sits in the hill country at about twenty-four hundred feet above sea level. Galilee, on the other hand, is in the Great Continental Rift and sits at six hundred feet below sea level. So, from Jerusalem you go down to Galilee even though it's north. So, they went down.

These men have come from Jerusalem on a mission. They are legal specialists sent from the capitol. You see, Jesus' ministry was causing a stir even as far away as the politically elite down in Jerusalem. So far, Jesus' opposition has been mostly local (the local religious leaders there in Galilee) but these men come from Jerusalem. They would have been high up in the religious echelons of Judaism. They would have been highly educated (experts in the Jewish law) and they were influential representatives of the most powerful leaders in the nation. Don't discount who these guys were. They would have been like the advisers around President Obama. They would have been the group that were the up-and-comers, the future of the leadership of the nation, and they come on a mission. But folks, they obviously have not come on a balanced fact-finding mission because they immediately come out with these outrageous allegations: He is possessed by Beelzebul, He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons. Now what would have forced such intelligent, educated men to have so quickly come to that conclusion?

Well, to really understand it, what really sparked their accusations, you have to turn back to Matthew's account. Go back to Matthew 12. This will explain why they had to come up with that conclusion. Matthew 12:22. This is that same morning before this encounter we've just

read. “Then a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute was brought to Jesus, and He healed him, so that the mute man spoke and saw.” Now watch what happened in verse 23. In response to this miracle, “All the crowds were amazed, and [they] were saying...” And notice, this is something that’s kind of a stir - they’re talking to each other, this is continually repeated. They were saying, ‘This man cannot be the Son of David, can He? Is it possible that this man, Jesus of Nazareth, is the Messiah?’ The religious leaders from the capitol were there, and they’re left with only one choice. Notice verse 24. “But when the Pharisees heard this...” When they heard people saying, ‘Maybe He’s the Messiah’ that’s when they respond with this outrageous accusation - this man casts out demons only by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons.

Now, when you look back at Mark, you’ll notice that they really level two accusations against Jesus. And again, you’ll notice in Mark’s account it says in verse 22, they “were saying.” The idea, again, in the Greek language is that this was something they were sort of sowing here and there. They would talk to this person and say, ‘You know this is really what’s going on in Jesus’ ministry.’ They’d talk to this person, and again repeat the story time after time. This was their repeated line. In the words of one commentator, “It was a sustained campaign of vilification.” They are after Jesus because people are saying He might be the Messiah. And so, in response to that, they make two accusations. The first one is, “He is possessed by Beelzebul.” Sometimes this name is copied from the Latin Vulgate. Maybe you’ve seen it where it’s rendered “Beelzebub” but it’s “Beelzebul.” We really don’t know for sure what this name means. There are a couple of possibilities. One is that it’s a sort of intentional slur or corruption of the name Beelzebub, the god of Ekron in the Philistines in the Old Testament, whose name meant “lord of the flies”. And it was corrupted to mean “lord of the dung”, alright, in polite language. And so, they’re basically using this name as a slur against Satan. That’s one possibility. The other possibility is that it simply means “lord of the dwelling”, that is, lord of the dwelling of evil spirits. And that makes sense, perhaps, because of the story Jesus is about to tell of the strong man’s house. We just don’t know. We can’t be sure what the name itself means, but we can be sure to whom it refers. Look at verse 22. Notice He says, or they say, “Beelzebul” and **they** identify him as the “ruler of the demons.” And when Jesus responds in verse 23 He says, “How can Satan cast out Satan?” So, there is no question who they intended. They were clearly accusing Jesus of being personally inhabited by and controlled by, indwelt by, Satan himself.

Jesus, they said, is possessed by the devil. That was their explanation for what happened that morning.

The second accusation is similar but unique: “He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons.” Now note here folks, that they cannot deny that a miracle has taken place. A miracle has happened, the demon has been cast out. The man can now see and speak, and so they can’t deny that. So, they’re left with only two options, right? Very simply, either they have to admit that it was of God or accuse Jesus of collusion with the devil, because those are the only two powers great enough to accomplish this. So, they don’t want to give in to the first because if they do, what will the people conclude? He’s the Messiah. They can’t go there, and so they try to undermine His teaching and authority by attributing His miracles to Satan. It is a deliberate perversion of the truth. You say, why would these religious leaders deliberately distort the truth about Jesus? Well later you remember, Pilot makes it very clear. Matthew says, Pilot knew that “because of envy” the religious leaders had handed Jesus over. This was all about power. This was all about who was in control, who was in authority. As you’re going to see in a moment, they knew this wasn’t true, but it’s what they had to spin in order to keep people from continuing that line ‘Maybe this is the Messiah.’ When they said this, when they said, “He is possessed by Beelzebul...He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons,” you know what they’re really saying? They’re saying, ‘This man is a liar. He’s presenting Himself as this righteous, religious man, you know, a law-abiding Jew, but it’s not true. He is not looking out for your best interests, instead, He’s got another agenda. He’s in league with Satan to accomplish it. And when He appears to cast out demons, He’s got exactly the opposite agenda of what He’s telling you. He is a hypocrite, a liar. He is demonically influenced. He is a wicked man.’ Now, what’s ironic about that is, compare that to what the demons, themselves, said about Jesus. You remember back in Mark 1? When they encountered Jesus, the demons were saying, “What business do we have with each other, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!” So, they were calling Jesus a lying hypocrite who was possessed by the devil himself. Jesus, they said, is a demonic liar. That was the accusation.

Now, Jesus responds to this in the next section. You see Jesus’ refutation here in verses 23-27. And He does this (He makes several points here) to refute their description. First of all, He

identifies the illogical conclusion to which they've come. He says it's ridiculous, it makes no sense. He begins in verse 23 by calling them to Himself. Now that's a very interesting expression, isn't it? "He called them to Himself". The clear implication is that these scribes and Pharisees from Jerusalem were talking behind Jesus' back, just out of earshot. Either they were somewhere else in Peter's house or just outside on the street; sort of sowing their discord around the edges. Matthew 12:25 tells us that Jesus knew their thoughts. And so, as Jesus often did, while He didn't hear directly what they said, He knew their thoughts and He chose to confront them straight on. And so, He calls them to Him.

Verse 23 continues by saying, "And He...began speaking to them in parables [saying], 'How can Satan cast out Satan?'" By the way, just as an aside, there are those who are in the larger scope of Christianity who claim that there is no personal devil. There is no personal being called Satan. There are no personal beings called demons. Jesus, here and in so many places, affirms the existence and personality of Satan and demons. Now Jesus accused the scribes here of being illogical, and then He gives two hypothetical illustrations to sort of make this point. First of all, verse 24: "If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand." Jesus says, 'Listen. What's happening between Me and Satan is not a matter of a kingdom that is divided, but of rival kingdoms at war. Verse 25: "If a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand." So, these are two illustrations to make the point. This doesn't mean there can't be some infighting in a household or in a kingdom. His point is, it is utterly opposed to common sense to purposefully try to build a kingdom while attacking the people within your kingdom. It is against common sense to try to build a house while attacking the people within that house. It doesn't make any sense. It's irrational. Jesus' conclusion, then, in verse 26, "If Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but...is finished." The bottom line is, to shoot your own soldiers is to risk losing your reign. It would be irrational for Satan to do this, and it was illogical for them to suggest it. That's Jesus' first response: it's ridiculous.

There's a second part of His refutation, and that is, He condemns the double standard. Now, we learn about this part of Jesus' response not from Mark but from Matthew. Matthew inserts this little line in the middle of what Jesus is saying. Matthew 12:27: "If I by Beelzebul cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? For this reason they will be your judges." There

were in the first century many instances of supposed Jewish exorcisms around the time of Christ. By the way, Jesus doesn't say here that they actually cast them out, only that they claimed to have cast them out. But His point is, your sons are casting out demons, I'm casting out demons. You're using a double standard to judge Me. Why don't you say your sons are casting them out by Satan? Obviously then, Jesus is saying you're not unbiased in your conclusion.

His third response to their accusation is to present the only reasonable conclusion. It's in verse 27. He says, "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." Now, this text has been terribly abused by charismatic theology, but what does it really mean? In this parable, Jesus explains what was really going on when He casts out demons. The picture is of a powerful man who has filled his house with all of his belongings, all of his goods. In the analogy, as I've written here on the PowerPoint, the strong man is Satan, the house is Satan's kingdom, the property or goods his human victims. And you can reduce Jesus' point to this: if you want to take what belongs to such a man, you first have to overpower the man. Jesus says that's exactly what's happening when I cast out demons. He was, in a very real sense, through an exercise of divine power, overpowering Satan and his servants, the demons; and Jesus was plundering his house, his kingdom. He was taking goods that belonged to Satan: the human victims of demon-possession. And Jesus could only do this because He was so much more powerful than the strong man of the house. As D. Edmond Hiebert writes, "The master of demons has found his master." So, Jesus says, 'No, it can't happen.'

So, you've seen the accusation. You've seen Jesus' refutation. Jesus finishes His message to them with a solemn warning in verses 28-30. Look at those three verses. "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 a unclean spirit.'" Notice He begins this with the word "truly." It's the Greek word "amén" which we get the word "amen." 'Amen, verily, truly', I say to you. It is the New Testament equivalent to the Old Testament "As I live, says the Lord." 'I assure you this is true based on My own authority.' This is one of the most solemn passages in all the New Testament.

It's also one of the most difficult to interpret but let's take it apart here and see if we can understand it. What is this? Is there in fact an unpardonable sin? And if there is, what is it? First of all, as we look at this warning Jesus gave, you can't miss the first verse because the first verse is an amazing expression of the mercy and grace of God. Look at verse 28. "Truly I say to you, all sins shall be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they utter." Obviously, He's talking on the condition of repentance and faith. He's not saying blanket 'without repentance and faith', but He's saying all kinds and classes of sins can and will be forgiven, even whatever blasphemies they speak against God. It's an amazing statement, isn't it? It's in a statement of the wide expanse of the mercy and grace of God. God's grace is truly amazing. There is nothing God will not forgive, with one exception. It's described in the next two verses, and it's usually called the unpardonable sin.

So, what is the unpardonable sin? Well, look at the effects first. Look at verse 29. "...never [whoever does this sin, commits this sin, never] has forgiveness..." That's an absolute negation of even the possibility. "...but is guilty of an eternal sin..." This is sin that bears eternal guilt, and the person who commits it will never be forgiven. So, what is this sin? Well, note, it's not ordinary blasphemy because Jesus has just said, in verse 28, all blasphemies will be forgiven. If you turn, if you were to turn to Matthew 12 and I have it here for you - Matthew 12:32. There, it's put like this: "Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him." To blaspheme Christ is not the unpardonable sin. In fact, you remember Paul? He blasphemed Christ. In 1 Timothy he tells us that, and he tells us he did it ignorantly in unbelief. Matthew 12 goes on to say this: "But whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come."

Now to really understand this sin, you have to understand the context of what had just happened that morning. Verse 30 gives it to us. Look at Mark 3:30. Jesus said this. He gave this statement, "because they were saying, 'He has an unclean spirit.'" So these scribes **and** religious leaders had apparently just committed this sin.

What then are the constituent elements of the unpardonable sin? What components have to be

present for the unpardonable sin? Number one: there has to be a manifest, undeniable act of the Spirit of God; a manifest, undeniable act of the Spirit of God. In this case it was the healing of the demon-possessed man who was blind and dumb. Think about it for a moment. No one questioned that he'd been both blind and dumb. No one questioned that he had been healed. And as Jesus pointed out, the only logical explanation was that it was the work of the Spirit of God. Even the people concluded that because they concluded that, perhaps, this healing meant that Jesus was the Messiah. So, there was a manifest, undeniable act of the Spirit of God.

And secondly, for there to be the unpardonable sin, there has to be an intentional, conscious act of attributing to Satan what you know to be the work of God. They knew a miracle had taken place. These men didn't doubt, for a moment, that a miracle had occurred. They knew it had to be from God. How do I know that? Well even one of their own (you remember, when he comes to Jesus by night), Nicodemus, how does he begin that speech to Jesus? Look at John 3:1-2. "Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, 'Rabbi, [watch this] we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.'" They knew, and yet in spite of the evidence, they intentionally attributed it to Satan. Why? Because they hated Jesus and they envied His influence with the people. It was because of envy. It was because of the desire for power and influence.

So, what is the unpardonable sin? It's blaspheming the Holy Spirit. And how do you blaspheme the Holy Spirit - when there is a manifest, undeniable act of the Spirit, and there is an intentional, conscious act of attributing to Satan what you know to be a work of God. Again, D. Edmond Hiebert writes, "When men deliberately dishonor the Spirit, misrepresenting His nature and work, they commit a crime which closes the door to the possibility of forgiveness."

Now, of course, this opens an important question. We've seen what it is. The next question that comes to everyone's mind is, can it committed to day? It obviously was committed then; that Jesus was giving this warning. Can this sin, the unpardonable sin, be committed today? Well, I don't think it's possible to say for sure. I do think it's very hard for this sin to happen today because - let me ask you this question, when is there such a clear, manifest work of God that no

one can deny it? But I will say this. If this sin does happen today, and it might, it will always have those same two characteristics. There will be a manifest, undeniable act of the Spirit, and an intentional, conscious act of attributing to Satan what you know to be a work of God.

That leads to the third question that many people have, and some people live in fear of this. How do I know whether or not I've committed it? Is it possible that I've committed it? Remember now, this sin is a persistent, conscious choice to assign to Satan what you know is of God. That doesn't happen by accident. It's not something you slip up and do. It doesn't happen without a conscious act of the will. That means, what Bishop Ryle said so long ago is absolutely true, "Those who are troubled with fears that they might have sinned the unpardonable sin are the very people who have not sinned it." Because only hardhearted, conscious choice of the will to rebel against God, to rebel against His ways (for whatever reasons) and to attribute to Satan what God has done, is the unpardonable sin.

So, what are the options for responding to Jesus and His claims? We've seen two of them so far. You have to conclude either His claims were false and He didn't know it, in which case He was a deluded lunatic; His claims were false, and He knew it and (as we've seen tonight and as the Pharisees accused Him) He is a demonic liar.

Now when you look at this account tonight, I want us to consider the implications of it. The first and clearest one is this: if Jesus was not delusional, and if Jesus is not who He claimed - if He's not God - then the Pharisees were right. It is the only logical alternative. This, by the way, became a common attack against Jesus from the Jews in early church history. The early Christian writers tell us that the Jewish apologists often made the charge of sorcery against Jesus. Let me give you a few quotes. This is in the Talmud, in the Sanhedrin section of the Talmud: "Yeshu of Nazareth was hanged on the day of preparation for the Passover because he practiced sorcery and led the people astray." Here's another quote from that section of the Talmud: "A master has said, Yeshu the Nazarene, practiced magic and led Israel away." Justin Martyr, one of the early Christians said, "They, the Jews, dared to say that Jesus was a magician and seducer of the people." Origen, in his writing against Celsus, says that Celsus laid to the Savior's charge that he had been enabled to perform the miraculous feats by sorcery." Tertullian, in *Against*

Marcion, said the Jews took Jesus “to be a magician with miraculous signs and a rival in teaching.” So, this caught on. Because again, you’re left with three alternatives: either He is Lord, or He’s a lunatic, or He’s a liar. Not many people buy into the fact that He was a lunatic, and so then you’re left with only this option, and this is where they resorted.

Look at Jesus’ response to all of this - Jesus’ explanation. Turn over to John 8. How does Jesus respond to the charge of being demon possessed, to being a demonic liar? John 8:41. In the context of the same accusation, look down in verse 52: “...You have a demon...” “...Now we know that You have a demon...” Okay? So, in the context of that same sort of mindset, that same sort of accusation, Jesus makes several very important points. The first point He makes is in verses 41-44: actions reveal who is really connected to the devil. You want to know who is connected to the devil? Look at how they live. Look at what they do because those who are of the devil will do what? They’ll imitate the devil, and that’s what He says. Look at verse 41. “‘You are doing the deeds of your father.’ They said to Him, ‘We were not born of fornication.’” (By the way, that’s a slur against Jesus. Remember, because of Joseph not being Jesus’ father, there was always that cloud hanging over Jesus’ head. So, this is probably a sort of backwards slap at Christ). “‘...we have one Father: God.’ Jesus said to them, ‘If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word.’” Remember what we talked about this morning? **The** sound waves were bouncing off their ears, but they weren’t really hearing. They didn’t have ears to hear. “‘...you cannot hear My word. You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.’” Remember now, they’ve just threatened to kill Him. They’re going to threaten again in a moment. Jesus says, ‘You want to know who’s of the devil? Look at how they live. I’m not threatening to kill you. I’m telling you the truth. I’m not lying. You are lying and you are threatening these things. Look at how a person lives and that’ll tell you whether he’s connected to the devil or not.’

His second response comes in verses 45-47. He says, ‘Look, I’m connected to the devil? Fine!

Verse...look at verse 46. “Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me?” What an amazing statement. Jesus says, ‘There is nobody here. I know that you are My enemies, but not one of you can legitimately convict me of a single sin.’ That was Jesus’ response to being connected to the devil. He says, ‘Look at how people live. Look at My life, and what you’ll find is there isn’t a single thing you can convict Me on.’ And isn’t that true when it came to the end and they tried to come up with a charge, and they tried to trump up a charge? They had to go to the bottom of the barrel to find a charge to convict Jesus on.

And then, in the face of all of that, He renews His claim to deity. I love this section. Verse 51: “‘Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he will never see death.’ The Jews said to him, ‘Now we know that you have a demon. Abraham died, and the prophets also; and You say, ‘If anyone keeps My word, he will never taste of death.’ Surely You are not greater than our father Abraham, who died? [Are you?] The prophets died too; whom do You make Yourself out to be?’ Jesus answered, ‘If I glorify Myself, My glory is nothing; it is My Father who glorifies Me, of whom you say, ‘He is our God’; and you have not come to know Him, but I know Him; and if I say that I do not know Him, I will be a liar like you, but I do know Him and keep His word. Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.’ So the Jews said to Him, ‘You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?’ [who lived twenty-one hundred years ago?] Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, [ego eimi] I am.’” You know what Jesus was claiming, right? You remember how God revealed Himself to Moses on the mountain in the burning bush? Here’s My name Moses: “I AM.” Jesus was claiming to be Yahweh of the Old Testament, claiming to be God—and they got it. Look at the next verse. “Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple.” This is how Jesus responds to this ridiculous charge that He is really a demonic liar.

Philip Schaff, the great church historian, writes this: “The hypothesis of imposture [that is being an imposter, pretending to be someone, somebody He’s not} is so revolting to moral as well as common sense, that its mere statement is its condemnation. How in the name of logic, common sense, and experience could an imposter (that is a deceitful, selfish, depraved man) have invented and consistently maintained from beginning to end the purest and noblest character known in

history with the most perfect air of truth and reality? How could He have convinced and successfully carried out a plan of unparalleled beneficence, moral magnitude and solemnity, and sacrificed His own life for it in the face of the strongest prejudices of His people and the ages? The answer is: that's an absolutely ridiculous possibility - couldn't happen." I love what Schaff has written in another place. He says, "It would take more than a Jesus to invent a Jesus."

A second implication is (we can see again) that miracles, in and of themselves, are never sufficient to cause a dead heart to believe. They knew a miracle had happened. There was no question in their minds. And yet what did they do? They tried to come up with some explanation that would work around that and still allow them to have what they wanted. Folks, this happens every day. Don't you know that this is what, for example, evolution is all about? God has painted Himself all over the universe! You can't miss His glory! The heavens are declaring the glory of God, the earth showing forth His handiwork. You can't miss it! It's a miracle! It happens every morning when that massive ball comes up in the east. How can you not see God in that? The answer is, according to Romans 1, they do. But they suppress that knowledge. And like the Pharisees, because they have an agenda, they find some other explanation, some other way around. A miracle, in and of itself, will never convince someone to believe. It takes a sovereign act of God's grace saying "Let there be light" in a dark heart. You know, in a strange way, there's an encouragement here for us because none of us can perform miracles. So, if that's what it took to get people to come to Christ, we'd all be in trouble. But that won't do it. God has chosen to shame the wisdom of the world by using a simple message of the Gospel, a simple sharing of the Gospel to bring life where there's death. You and I can do that.

Third implication is that, as Jesus' followers, we too will be called liars and deceivers who have some other agenda. Turn with me to Matthew 10 as we finish our time tonight. Jesus couldn't have made it clearer in Matthew 10 and look at verse 24: "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. It is enough for the disciple that he will become like his teacher, and the slave like his master. [So, here's the implication.] If they have called the head of the house [Me, Jesus says] Beelzebul, how much more will they malign the members of his household!" Jesus says, 'Expect the same treatment. If they said that I was an evil man, a liar, a hypocrite

(ever heard that before?), that I really wasn't what I seemed, then you're going to hear the same thing. Don't be surprised.' And He goes on to say, verse 26: "Therefore do not fear them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known [so don't be afraid to speak]. What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light; and what you hear whispered in your ear, proclaim upon the housetops. Do not fear those who kill the body [when persecution, even physical persecution comes, do not fear those who kill the body] but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." And then He goes on to talk about God's sovereign providence, His care. "Are not two sparrows sold for a cent [for the very smallest copper coin]? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father?" Notice, it doesn't say apart from your Father *knowing*. The point is, He is in charge. Not one of them falls to the ground apart from the sovereign providence of God. "The very hairs of your head are all numbered. So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows." Don't be afraid to confess Jesus as Lord before men because, "I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I also will deny him before My Father who is in heaven." (By the way, He's not talking about something like happened with Peter where Peter, out of fear, denied His Lord. He's talking about that ultimate repudiation. He is not describing the kind of that happened with Peter).

Then He goes on to say, listen, there's going to be conflict. Verse 34: expect conflict. The Gospel brings peace to the human heart but it doesn't always bring peace to even a family. Verse 35: "For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will be the members 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 [up] his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it." Jesus says, 'Listen, don't be surprised. Just as they will call you part of the lunatic fringe, just as My brothers thought I was out of My mind, in the same way, just as they said I was a hypocrite, a liar, I had a different agenda than I appeared to have, I was just a pious fraud, really demonic almost (well, in His case certainly, in our case they may say that almost). Expect it. It'll happen, and don't be afraid of it.' Don't be ashamed of Christ. They said the same thing about Him, and the servant is not greater than his master, and

the student is not greater than his teacher. “It is enough (notice verse 25) for the disciple that he become like his teacher, and the slave like his master.”

There are only three options. And we haven't found the right one yet. But we'll see it the next time we come to this passage together.

Let's pray.

Father, thank You that You have opened our eyes to see our Lord as the Beautiful Savior, Wonderful Counselor, the Almighty God, the Eternal Father, the Prince of Peace. Father, we thank You that He is to us our Sovereign Lord, Divine Lord, and not a deluded lunatic, not a demonic liar as He was accused. But we see Him for who He really is, Your Son. Father, help us to follow in His steps, to serve Him faithfully, and to remember that we can expect the same treatment He got. But thank you, O God, that someday everything will be made right and the truth will be known, and every knee will bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord to Your great glory. Until that day, O God, keep us faithful to Him. Help us to confess Him as Lord before men. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen!