

DERANGED OR DEMON POSSESSED?

Mark 3:7-35

In our previous study of Mark 2:1-3:6 we discovered that Jesus said and did some outrageous things. Jesus claimed authority to forgive sins and then validated His claim by healing a paralyzed man (2:1-12). What makes His claim outrageous is that only God has authority to forgive sins so without question Jesus was claiming to be deity.

He recruited to His team and enjoyed table fellowship with a Jewish tax collector, the lowest of the low in Jewish society (2:13-17). He disregarded conventional rules of piety (2:18-22) and He claimed authority over the Law of Moses and its Sabbath law (2:23-3:6).

These things were radical then and they're radical now because if they were true about Jesus then, then they're true about Jesus now.

How did the people at that time respond to Jesus' claims and actions?

The peoples response is exactly what John Mark is showing us in Mark 3:7-35.

First, he reports the response of the crowd who poured into Capernaum from all over Israel.

THE CROWD (3:7-12)

Mark 3:7-12 (ESV)

⁷ Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the sea, and a great crowd followed, from Galilee and Judea ⁸ and Jerusalem and Idumea and from beyond the Jordan and from around Tyre and Sidon. When the great crowd heard all that he was doing, they came to him. ⁹ And he told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, lest they crush him, ¹⁰ for he had healed many, so that all who had diseases pressed around him to touch him. ¹¹ And whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, "You are the Son of God." ¹² And he strictly ordered them not to make him known.

The scene described here took place over a period of time, perhaps weeks or months. People literally streamed to Jesus in Capernaum from all over Israel. They came from Jerusalem and farther south from Idumea, well over a 120 mile trip on foot.¹ They came down from Sidon in the northwest, a 50 mile trip. Sick and crippled, this was hard on the people who came, but they came in droves. Twice John Mark refers to the *great* crowd. I assume there were thousands who descended upon Capernaum undoubtedly overwhelming this small fishing community.

The people were so aggressive in wanting to touch Jesus He was fearful of being crushed. A small boat was kept at the ready so Jesus could step out of the crowd. The shouts of the healed were intermingled with the shouts of the demonized. It was a crazy scene.

¹ Jerusalem to Capernaum is actually 90 miles, but because devout Jews would not travel through Samaria, the detour to the east side of the Jordan River added the extra miles.

John Mark is showing that the crowds weren't bothered by Jesus' outrageous claims, not because they believed, but because they didn't care. They were intent on one thing – getting healed. Who or what Jesus claimed to be didn't much matter as long as they got healed.

This is not hard to understand. Human nature hasn't changed. Few people are truly committed to seeking truth. Our focus is on ...*the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions...* (1 Jn. 2:16). Even though they were hurting, Jesus still held them accountable to respond to the truth He was teaching (Mark 4:1-34).

Ironically, the demons took the identity of Jesus far more seriously than did the crowd.

The crowd responded to Jesus' claims with indifference; the apostles with commitment.

THE APOSTLES (3:13-19)

Mark 3:13–19 (ESV)

¹³ And he went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him. ¹⁴ And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach ¹⁵ and have authority to cast out demons. ¹⁶ He appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); ¹⁷ James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder); ¹⁸ Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Zealot, ¹⁹ and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

The amazing thing is that even though Jesus made claims that severely challenged their theology and messianic expectations, these men remained open-minded to the evidence and were willing to take this deeper step of faith and commitment to Jesus. They didn't fully comprehend everything about Jesus and His mission, but they believed He was telling the truth so they continued to follow Him.

With these twelve, Jesus completed recruiting His team. They attached themselves to Jesus as their Master Teacher and travelled with Him throughout the rest of His public ministry. Jesus sent them out to preach the coming of the Kingdom and gave them authority to cast out demons in the course of their preaching campaigns.

The crowds responded to Jesus's claims with indifference. The Apostle's responded with faith. How did Jesus' family respond?

JESUS' FAMILY (3:20-21; 31-34)

Mark 3:20–21 (ESV)

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

Jesus' family traveled the 20 miles from Nazareth to Capernaum to take control of Jesus and stop His public ministry because they believed He was insane. Word had gotten to them about what was going on in Capernaum presumably including their brother's claims to have divine authority to forgive sins and countermand Sabbath laws.

For Jesus' sake and for the reputation of the family they intended to take control of Jesus and bring Him home to Nazareth.

Some struggle with this fact that Jesus' own family thought He was insane and try to find an alternative interpretation of verses 20-21. But verses 31-32 make it clear that, in fact, it was Mary and Jesus' brothers who came for Him.²

Mark 3:31–32 (ESV)

³¹ And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. ³² And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you."

Before Mary and Jesus' brothers can get to Capernaum and take Jesus in hand an even more damaging accusation comes from the higher ups in Jerusalem.

LEADERS OF JUDAISM (3:22-30)

Mark 3:22–30 (ESV)

²² And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "by the prince of demons he casts out the demons." ²³ And he called them to him and said to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? ²⁴ If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵ And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. ²⁶ And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end. ²⁷ But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house.

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

Forced to give some explanation for Jesus' powers, the official assessment from Jerusalem was that Jesus Himself was demon-possessed and casting out demons by the authority of Satan. This is what the scribes from Jerusalem were declaring in Capernaum to the crowds.

Jesus easily dismantled their accusation by exposing the absurdity that Satan would be fighting against himself. Instead, in verse 27, Jesus claimed to be the one who had bound Satan (the strong man) so as to plunder his house (free the demonized from Satan's control).

Then Jesus delivered a severe warning to the leaders of Judaism. Jesus was ministering by the power of the Holy Spirit, not Satan. They were blaspheming the Holy Spirit and misleading the people. They will not be forgiven.

John Mark concludes this section with the arrival of Jesus' family and another radical statement by Jesus.

² It should be made clear, however, that though they believed *at this time* Jesus was insane, later they came to faith. James, the brother of Jesus, became head of the Jerusalem Church and Jude authored the book that bears his name in the New Testament.

JESUS' NEW FAMILY (3:31-35)

Mark 3:31-35 (ESV)

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

We now know why Mary and her sons were seeking Jesus – they intended to take control of Jesus and stop His ministry.

In declaring those around Him His family, Jesus was declaring that His relationship with His followers superseded His relationship with His blood kin. This was a radical idea in a strong-group culture where loyalty/allegiance to blood family was every individual's highest obligation. Jesus transferred that obligation/loyalty to His "new" family – all those who do the will of God. That is not to say that Jesus no longer cared for Mary and His brothers and sisters; even as He hung on the cross He made provision for Mary as was His obligation as head of household (John 19:26-27).

But Jesus signaled here and elsewhere that the bond between His followers was a bond that went deeper than that of blood family.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

If the claims of Jesus are true, they affect us today.

Each one of us is responsible to respond to Jesus.

Hopefully you have an open mind to look at the evidence and come to your own conclusion. Don't be like the crowds who just accepted the opinion of the Jewish leadership that Jesus was demon possessed. You will have professors with PhD's that will deny Jesus ever claimed to be God or who say the gospels are not reliable history. You'll see all kinds of things said about Jesus and the Bible on Facebook and on the news claiming proof that Jesus didn't rise from the dead or that the church concocted the sayings and stories of Jesus in order to defend its beliefs. Keep these things in perspective; just as there was a wide range of responses to Jesus back then, there is a wide range of responses to Jesus now. And just because someone is considered a scholar does not mean their opinion is true; the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were the PhD's of the day and they made the inane accusation that Jesus was casting out Satan by Satan.

You are responsible for your response to Jesus. If Jesus is true, indifference will have tragic, eternal consequences (Rev. 20:11-15).

You need to do the research. You need to ask questions and put things to the test. No one is asking you to have "blind faith". Our faith must be built on evidence or it will not endure.

We have many good resources amongst our discipleship books. I recommend *The Case for Christ*. *The Case for Christ* deals with many of the responses of those who

deny the claims of Christ. In addition, at the end of each chapter, the author lists three or four books to further research a specific topic.

You are responsible for your response to Jesus.

Don't tame Jesus. His claims and actions were outrageous. In closing, consider the words of C.S. Lewis:

"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."³

³ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan-Collier, 1960), 55-56.