

# Mark 3:20-35 - Who is Jesus?

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] it'll come and read God's word for us and then I'll pray before I preach. Hello. We are today, as Steve has said, Mark chapter 3 verses 20 to 35. That's page 1005 on the Blue Bibles.

Let's read.

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.

In fact, no one can enter a strongman's house without first tying him up. Then he can plunder the strongman's house. Truly, I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter.

[ 1 : 2 8 ] But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven. They are guilty of an eternal sin. He said this because they were saying he has an impure spirit.

Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. A crowd was sitting around him and they told him, your mother and your brother are outside looking for you.

Who are my mother and my brothers? He asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, here are my mother and my brothers. Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother.

So this is the word of the Lord. Thank you so much, Theodore. Let's keep that passage open. We're going to work our way through it. Let me pray for us as we come to God's word. Let me pray. Oh, Heavenly Father, how we thank you that none of us are here to share our own good ideas, let alone me and mine, but that we're here to listen to you.

And that with joyful confidence, we know that as your word is open, your spirit is at work and you speak to us. How we pray this morning that you might make us good listeners.

[ 2 : 3 7 ] How we pray, please, Lord, that you might encourage us and strengthen us. Rebuke us even where we might need that. That we might love you and trust you and live our lives for your praise and glory. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. Our passage this morning invites us to ask a very simple and straightforward but really important question of who is Jesus?

Now, you might be sat there thinking, brilliant. I know the answer to that one, Steve. Jesus is the Son of God. So you went and did GCSE at school and you think, I've nailed this.

I know that he is the Son of God, which of course is right. But if you take a look at chapter 3 and verse 11, you'll find that the demons call Jesus the Son of God and they're rebuked for it.

So there must be a little bit more to it than just that. And that's because I think when Mark asks us the question, who is Jesus? Really what he's asking us is a relational question.

[ 3 : 39 ] He's asking us how we relate to Jesus. Not sort of who is Jesus in the abstract, but who is Jesus to you? Let me try and explain with an analogy.

It's not a perfect one, but hopefully it will make the point. Imagine that you come through the doors of church in the morning and I welcome you and you're there with a friend. And I point to your friend and I look at you in the eye and I say, who is this?

Who is this? Well, presumably in that, I mean, I know in a British setting that's a bit rude, isn't it? So I'd couch it in some nice sort of friendly British terms, but you know what I mean. So what in that setting am I expecting for you to tell me?

Well, yes, you might tell me their name and that would be a useful thing to know. But I would also expect you to tell me how it is that you are there with them, how you relate to them. Oh, this is my brother.

This is my long lost friend. This is my colleague. This is my granddaughter. Because when I ask that question, what I'm really asking you is, who is this person in relationship with you?

[ 4 : 44 ] Who are they to you? And that really captures something of what Mark is trying to get us to ask this morning as we look at this passage. He doesn't want you just to think in the abstract, oh, who is Jesus?

Oh, he's the son of God. I know that tick. No, he's asking you, who is Jesus to you? Who is he to you? The focus of this relational knowing comes through these encounters that Jesus has with two groups of people in our passage.

The first is with his family. And the other is with this delegation of religious leaders that have come from Jerusalem. And I just want to spend our time considering those two groups and then thinking together how Jesus expects us to answer that question and what he would like us to say.

So let's first think about Jesus' family. If you were to ask Jesus' family, who is Jesus? They would give you this answer. Oh, Jesus is our brother and we've come to get him or we've come to take control of him.

This whole section that we've just read is pinned between two encounters between Jesus and his family. In verses 20 and 21 and then again in verse 30 and 32, Jesus is talking about his relationship with his family or his family are talking about their relationship with him.

[ 5 : 55 ] And the action takes place in what verse 20 refers to as a house, which is probably better translated home. Meaning in all probability, Jesus here is back in Capernaum and back in the home that had the roof dug through in chapter two.

Jesus now is near his family. He's come back after one of his ministry trips. And if you look down at verse 21, you'll notice that Jesus' family come to take charge of him, saying at the end of the verse that he's out of his mind.

Let me read the verse to you. When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said he is out of his mind. It seems that this assessment that they've made about Jesus is something to do with the fact that he's not been able to eat in verse 20.

He's so busy that he's not been able to eat. You can perhaps imagine the conversation, can't you, around the dinner table in Jesus' family home. Have you heard Jesus is back in town?

Oh yeah, I've heard he's back in town. Have you heard that he's not eating? Oh yeah, I've heard that he's not eating. Aren't you worried about that? Yeah, I'm worried about that. Don't you think we should do something about that? Yeah, I think we should do something about that. Let's go. And they go and get it.

[ 7 : 00 ] It's interesting when they get there in verse 31, they stand outside the house and summon Jesus to come out. It's an interesting kind of power play, isn't it?

They assume that their presence outside of the house and their instructions sent in will be enough to gather him. But actually it fails dramatically, so much so that Jesus even denies that they're his real mother and brothers because of the way they're dealing with him.

There's a guy that I see at most mornings walking his dog in Queen's Park. It's a German shepherd dog like that.

He's a nice guy. We say hello, which means I think in London terms we're probably best of friends, I think, as far as I can tell. Well, I imagine this guy, when he bought the German shepherd dog, he thought he was buying a nice, cute, fluffy pet that would be a lovely companion on walks around Queen's Park.

I can imagine him sort of watching YouTube videos of really well-behaved German shepherds thinking, oh, that's going to be lovely, isn't it? I'm going to have lovely walks around the park with this beautiful, fluffy dog. But what he has actually got is a dog that has a completely different mind, a mind totally of its own, a dog which takes him for walks.

[ 8 : 18 ] It's actually not so much that my friend has got a pet, but the pet has got an owner who he is really in charge of. And in a sense, in a hopefully non-irreverent way, that's what these brothers think about Jesus.

They think they've got a pet saviour, a pet divinity, someone that they can give instructions to, someone who every now and again will probably need a bit of intervention and a bit of direction.

A cute Jesus. A cute Jesus who would come home, sit around the dinner table and submit himself to their plans. He would accomplish their dreams, he would heal their broken hearts, fix their finances.

And Jesus says, no, no, no, no, no. That leash is not mine. I am not your pet. You don't get to tell me that I am out of my mind. You don't get to tell me to rein it in.

You don't get to query my mission. I am not your boy. I'm your Lord, your King, your God. I wonder, it happens like this, doesn't it?

[ 9 : 22 ] So often Christians can be so eager for their friends to meet with Jesus that they introduce him like this kind of pet divinity. You know, he's full of just gentleness and love towards you and he's come to bless your plans.

He's come to stand with you at the difficult moments. Of course, I'm not going to tell you that Jesus is not full of love and kindness. Of course he is. But if you answer the question of who is Jesus with, oh, he's my boy, he's in my corner, he's got my back.

We've not really understood him. If that's all you know about Jesus, you haven't really understood who he is. And it's perhaps more important than just saying, oh, you've got that wrong.

It's more important than that. In a way, if you answer the question like that, if that's who Jesus is to you, then your whole understanding of reality is twisted and corrupted. Because if you think like that about Jesus, what you're thinking is that you're the God of God.

But yeah, you're thinking that when you encounter God in flesh, you get to tell him what to do. Of course you don't, do you? That seat is not your seat.

[ 10 : 35 ] You are not on the throne. It seems in the context here that the people most likely to make this mistake about Jesus are the people who know him best. The brothers who've grown up with him.

Perhaps church kids who can't remember not knowing Jesus. People for whom the Christian life is more really like a culture. It's the posters on the wall. It's the songs on the radio. It's the place that we visit at big life events.

It's the person that you turn to in a crisis. When in reality, Jesus says, no, no, no, no, no. I am Lord. I am King. You are not my brother.

You are not my mother. You don't get to tell me what to do. I rule and I reign. It's interesting, isn't it? I think the Roman Catholic Church finds these verses very difficult.

Roman Catholic Church has imagined that Jesus' mother is better than this. An insider with the person of Jesus simply because of her relationship with him. As his mother. But Jesus says clearly here, doesn't he?

[ 11 : 37 ] Even Mary has to bow the knee. Repent of her sins and come to Christ as Savior and Lord. We're going to come back to some of those ideas. But before we do, let's move on to think about the second answer to the who is Jesus question.

And that's the answer of the teachers of the law in verse 22. And they say Jesus is a demonic wizard and should be shunned. Something like that, at least. If you look down at verse 22, you're told that a delegation of religious officials have arrived from Jerusalem.

Of course, that's just exactly what you would expect because Jesus has been healing so many people. He's been causing a big fuss. Everyone will have heard about him. And so word has found its way to Jerusalem.

A delegation are sent north to pass verdicts on Jesus. And that's what they do. End of verse 22, they say he is possessed by Beelzebul, the prince of demons.

By the prince of demons, he's driving out demons. This is obviously a step further, isn't it, than he is out of his mind in verse 21. Here, their accusation is that Jesus is some kind of dark magician.

[ 12 : 40 ] In touch with forces, but not in a good way. I don't know quite where you're up to, but if you're concerned about the historical accuracy of Mark's account, this idea of Jesus being a magician is repeated through lots of contemporary histories of the time.

It means, doesn't it, that at the very least, even the people who oppose Jesus don't deny that he is doing some things which are very difficult to explain. They couldn't. They're surrounded, aren't they, by the evidence of Jesus' miraculous works.

But despite being surrounded by the evidence, it hasn't helped them. It means, too, doesn't it, if you're not just concerned about the historical accuracy of Mark, if you think the reason I'm not a Christian is because Jesus hasn't demonstrated to me in power one of these kind of signs that I see in the New Testament.

If you think that, well, it seems that history is against you, too, because people who see the signs don't necessarily put their faith in Jesus.

Signs don't lead to faith. They lead to alternative explanations, and that's what's happening here. Really, there are two accusations being leveled at Jesus. One is that he is possessed by Beelzebul, a colloquial name for the devil.

[ 13 : 55 ] The other is that it is by that power that he is driving out demons, and that's the force that is at work in him. But Jesus points out that it is completely illogical, because if Satan is driving out Satan, then evil is set against evil, and it will just disappear.

To make his point, he uses this parable that we looked at with the kids of a house or a kingdom, where a civil war inevitably brings a collapse. Look at verse 24. 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. In other words, Jesus says, don't think about the devil as an evil force, but really as a king of a kingdom, a sort of dynasty, a dynasty that has a sort of purpose and unity.

It's a house. And if that house or dynasty is fighting against itself, then you really don't need to worry about its power, because it will automatically undermine itself. But Jesus doesn't just leave it there, does he?

If you look down, it actually gets quite difficult. He says, listen, if you identify me as being demon-possessed, that's a really serious accusation. To look at the work of Jesus, the work that he is doing in the power of the Spirit, and to call that the devil's work, cuts you off from salvation itself.

[ 15 : 21 ] Jesus' work is not done in the power of the devil, but by the power of God, the Spirit who dwells in Jesus. And to look at what the Spirit is doing in Christ, and to call it the work of the devil, or the spirit of the devil, that, says Jesus, is an unforgivable sin.

Verse 29. Blasphemy against the Spirit. Now, I don't know how much you've read the Bible, but it sounds kind of strange, doesn't it, to have an unforgivable sin, when forgiveness and the message of forgiveness is at the center of the Scriptures.

But here's point is not that the sin is so bad that it is beyond the forces of redemption. Rather, it is beyond forgiveness because it shuns the only hope of forgiveness. In other words, this is not the accidental sin of a well-meaning believer, or even the wayward sin of an unbeliever.

Instead, this is a heart that is so hard and so callous, it looks at what has been done in the power of the Spirit and says, that is evil. And to say that, says Jesus, is not an accidental sin, it's an unforgivable one, because it's a heart that will not turn.

It's a heart that looks forgiveness in the face and says, I don't want anything to do with that. And it remains unforgiven. You can ask me more about that over coffee if you want to at the end, but don't miss the thread of what's happening here.

[ 16 : 39 ] The big point really is not so much about this unforgivable sin, but the intention, I think, of the Jewish leaders. Think about it for a moment. What do you think the Jewish leaders intended to do? Surely they knew this was illogical, right?

Surely they knew that to look at what Jesus was doing and say that's been done in the power of the devil, that makes absolutely no sense, does it? They know that. They're not thinking that they're right.

It's stupid, isn't it? Jesus points that out to them. So why do they say it? What are they trying to achieve? Well, notice really their intention is to discredit Jesus. They want to rubbish Jesus and what he's doing.

They want to stop people listening to Jesus. You see, to go back to our illustration that I started with at the beginning, this sort of greeting at the door of church. You bring somebody in and I point at them and say, who is this?

And look at you for an answer. And you really don't want me to have anything to do with that person who you're bringing in. You want me not to like them, not to say anything else to them. What do you say? You say something like, oh, this is Derek.

[ 17 : 46 ] He has something worse than COVID. He looks to me like he's about to sneeze. Right? What am I going to do then? I'm going to back right off. I'm going to be, you know, well, you know, I don't want anything to do with him.

Yeah? That's what's going on here. Jesus is possessed by Beelzebul, they say. Don't have anything to do with him. Steer clear of him.

The religious leaders are jealous of Jesus and they're trying to get the crowds as well to hate him. So they discredit him. Now, when you see it like that, you see that people do that all the time, don't you, to Jesus?

I think it's probably difficult to find anybody who would say that Jesus was demon possessed and to rubbish Jesus like that. So we discredit him in other ways.

We say, oh, the miracles didn't happen. He didn't do those. Oh, Jesus never really claimed to be God. Jesus was just a good teacher. Oh, we can't really be sure about what Jesus said. Lots of people say those sorts of things all the time about Jesus.

[ 18 : 46 ] And their intention is not really to deal with the facts. It's just to discredit Jesus so they don't have to listen to him. It's how other religions treat Jesus as well. You know, Islam says that Jesus was just a man.

Oh, you don't need to worry too much about Jesus. This is an interesting guy. You might want to read what he said. But he was just a man. But Jesus never claimed to be just a man. Muhammad comes along 600 years after Christ and says that the eyewitnesses were wrong, which is an incredible claim.

It's easily proved to be illogical. But actually, that's not the point, is it? They just want to discredit Jesus. You don't need to listen to him. You don't need to take him seriously. Secularists or atheists would do the same.

You know, they'll tell you, listen, all that stuff about walking on water, healing the sick, feeding thousands of people at the same time. The idea of somebody dying and then walking out of the tomb is utterly ridiculous. Nobody does that.

You know, don't you? Look around you. Those things don't happen. The stories must be made up. Jesus perhaps has a few good ideas, but you don't need to take him really that seriously because most of the stuff around him is just, you know, it's just fluff.

[ 19 : 52 ] It's just made up. But, of course, that completely neglects the evidence of history. It's so patronizing, isn't it, to look back and say, you know, those sorts of things don't happen, so they couldn't have happened.

Of course, the people in that day knew that those sorts of things didn't normally happen, right? That's why they wrote them down, because it was unusual. But, of course, secular atheism isn't trying to get you to engage with the facts.

They're trying, like the teachers of the law, to get you to walk away, to discredit Jesus. Friends, can I ask us this morning to be wise to this? You and I live in a world which will do all it can to discredit Jesus.

If you're not a Christian this morning, it is likely that you have not engaged with the facts about who Jesus is, but just really a whole load of perceptions which are designed to discredit him.

And if you're a Christian this morning, you need to take seriously the fact that you live in a world that discredits Jesus and doesn't want you to listen to him. And that means that the battle for the Christian life is not so much the battle for the evidence, because that is utterly overwhelming.

[ 21 : 00 ] It means that your battle for the Christian life is about your willingness to identify with a person that everybody else discredits and considers rubbish.

Will you align yourself with someone who our culture thinks is silly or even dangerous? Now we've nearly finished, but I want us to close by thinking about who Jesus really is in relation to us.

I want us to see that the answer isn't just a trite, the son of God, that the demons say in verse 11, but something much more personal than that. You see, what Mark wants you to see about Jesus is this. Jesus is the stronger man who sets me free.

Look down at verse 27. Notice what he says. 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.

Just work through this parable with me. In the parable, the strong man is the devil. And the devil here has a house, a house that is full of possessions, plunder, as he's called it.

- [ 22 : 05 ] And the plunder is not really pretty pigs. The plunder is people, hostages, if you like. Hostages who are held captive by the strength of the strong man who owns the home. They can't get out and no one can get in to get them out. No one can enter, says Jesus. But there is, of course, one way that you get the plunder out of a strong man's house. And that is by the strength of a stronger man who comes and ties him up. And then the house is free to be plundered. This is Jesus' explanation of who he is in relation to you and me.
- Jesus says to you and I, listen, by your very nature, you are born into a world where you are under the dominion of Satan. You are locked into a strong man's house.
- You know, the religious leaders come here to Jesus and say, Jesus is demon possessed. And Jesus says, no, I'm not. You are under the captivity of Satan himself.
- [ 23 : 09 ] You're hostages of the devil in a kingdom of darkness ruled by a wicked and strong king. Now, you might say to me, wow, wow, that's so strong, Steve. I'm not bound. I'm not captive.
- I'm free to do what I want. But let me say to you, don't mistake our freedom to sin with a freedom from sin.
- Right? Don't mistake the two. It's not the same, is it? The ability that we have to get away with wicked stuff is not the same as being free to get away from wicked stuff, is it?
- You know that, don't you? Just the fact that you can do something doesn't mean that you can get away from the presence of it. The things that we do wrong are piled on us like a burden.
- And you don't need me to persuade you of that. You only need to think about it. The things that we feel guilty of. And Jesus' picture here is of being hostages in a house of wickedness.
- [ 24 : 11 ] And it's designed to capture that reality that we all experience. It's probably worth saying as well, this isn't just a one verse point. This is the consistent witness of the scriptures.
- That outside of Christ, Jesus says that we are slaves to sin. Anyone who sins is a slave to sin, says Jesus in John's gospel. The book of Romans talks about us being under the rule of sin.
- Slaves to wickedness. Ephesians says that we follow the ways of the world and the ruler of the kingdom of the air. Peter talks about being slaves of depravity. The book of Titus talks about being enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures.
- Now those things aren't meant to mean that we're all as bad as we could be. You say, actually I do some good stuff, Steve. Well, yeah, no, none of those are meant to say that you're as bad as you could be. You know, the sun gets in through the shutters of this house.
- We're not all locked in the same dark corner, but we're still all in there by nature and there's no escape. Of course, you know that, don't you, if you've tried. The burden of guilt and shame, the sense of pointlessness and futility.
- [ 25 : 19 ] The idea that kind of just screwing up, trying to put it right, carrying on with the burden of it being done and then eventually dying. It's a hostage.
- It's a burden. But listen to what Jesus says in verse 27. He says, in effect, listen, I'm stronger than the strong man who's held you captive. In fact, the reality is I've tied him up. I've bound him. And right now I am here plundering his kingdom and liberating hostages for glory. Do you want out? Do you want to come? Interestingly, in the context, it seems that the means of liberation is the forgiveness of verse 28.

Jesus can liberate all sin and slander. That means that the guilt is the binding, isn't it? The binding that the devil has done is to do with our moral guilt.

And the freedom that Christ offers is the freedom of the cross. Where ironically, Jesus is the stronger man whose strength is in the weakness of death. And Jesus' binding of the devil is even as he is being bound to the cross.

[ 26 : 29 ] Paul puts it like this in Colossians 1 verse 13. He says, for he, that is Jesus, has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the son he loves.

In whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. That's the good news that Jesus is talking about. Notice just with me how this works in the passage.

So I said to you that verses 20 and 21 are about his family. And then verses 31 down to verse 33 are also about his family. They're like the bookends that hold this account of demon possession and the accusation of demon possession and then the work of Satan.

Well, those bookends are then themselves bookended, aren't they? So if you look at verse 34, it's Jesus looking around and saying, who are my mother and my brothers? It's anybody who does my father's will.

And that bit mirrors the bit before it, which is the calling of the disciples. In other words, Jesus is saying, listen, I've got a new family. I've got a new house. I am liberating you from this house to come to my house, my kingdom, my way.

[ 27 : 46 ] In other words, to be a Christian in Mark 3 is not just to have your sins forgiven. It's not even just to be liberated from the captivity and bondage to sin. No, being a Christian in Mark 3 is being liberated to live with God in his house, in his kingdom.

I wonder if just for the last time I could imagine that greeting at the door of church again. But this time it's not you walking in. It's Jesus walking in and he's walking in with you.

And the father points to you and says to Jesus, who's this? Who's this?

And Jesus replies, that's my brother, my sister, my mother. They were lost, but I found them.

They were in captivity, but I freed them. They were in chains, defeated, locked up, held. But I tied up the strong man and I've rescued them through my death on the cross.

[ 28 : 57 ] And now I've brought them home to live with us. Listen, that's what Mark wants you to find about Jesus. That he is this binder of Satan who alone can set you free.

And for us as a church, he wants us to know, listen, this is the age of liberation. We live in the age of liberation. The time in which Jesus has bound Satan and the gospel is rescuing people from his clutches.

This is the picture in Revelation 20, this binding of Satan. This is the day of salvation that Paul talks about in Corinthians. The day when Satan's house is there for the getting, for the plundering.

And so we preach this message of freedom in Jesus Christ. Come, be rescued by Jesus the liberator. He will set you free. And if you're a Christian this morning, that's your story.

You have been set free by Jesus Christ. Let's have a moment first for silent prayer and then I will pray. And then I'll invite the band up and we can sing together.

[ 30 : 07 ] Amen. Heavenly Father, we thank you so much that Jesus is the stronger man.

Who even in the weakness of death, even in the bondage of the cross, is able to set us free. He has the power and the strength, not only to defeat our sin, but to defeat Satan himself.

Binding him. That we might be set free. Please, Lord, we want to pray for anybody this morning for whom that has not been their experience. May they find that even now.



May they turn to you in their hearts and say, Jesus, set me free from sin. And for those of us who've been Christians for a long time, Lord, we want to rejoice that you've set us free.

We want to enjoy the freedom that you've given us. We want to revel in it. We want to delight in it. We want to praise you for it. We want to pray that you might forgive us that so often we find ourselves wandering back to that old house.

[ 31 : 32 ] Wondering what it was like in there. Please forgive us. Show us mercy. And help us to live in the freedom of the spirit for the sake of your glory. In Jesus name. Amen.

Amen.