

Amazing Accusations

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 24 July 2005

Preacher: Rod McArdle

[0 : 0 0] I'm willing to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That's the one thing that we mustn't say.

A man who was merely a man and said the sorts of things that Jesus said wouldn't be a great moral teacher. He'd either be a lunatic on the level with the man who says he's a poached egg, or else he'd 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, you can kill him as a demon, or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God.

But don't let us come with any patronising nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He hasn't left that open to us. He didn't intend to. All the other words of the converted atheist and brilliant scholar of Oxford and Cambridge Universities, C.S. Lewis.

And I think we've found as we've gone through these early chapters of Mark that again and again we are forced to consider the very basic question.

[1 : 2 1] Who is this man? Who is this Jesus of Nazareth? In fact, even when we get to the end of chapter 4, after that extraordinary miracle of the stilling of this terrifying storm, it's still the question on the disciples' mouth.

Who is this man? And the words of C.S. Lewis are just as pertinent today as they were when he penned them in that great little book, Mere Christianity.

Either this man was and is the Son of God or else a madman or something worse. You can't shut him up for a fool. You can spit at him and you can kill him as a demon.

Or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. If you were with us last week, you recall that we looked at the first 19 verses of chapter 3 of Mark.

And in that passage we encountered four groups, four different responses to Jesus. There was the response, the hostility of the religious authorities, the response of the unclean spirits, the milling crowd that came from the north and the east and the south and pressed on Jesus.

[2 : 3 2] And then there was the response of the disciples themselves. And so when we come to our passage this morning, at the end of chapter 3, we also encounter two groups. There's Jesus' family and there's also the scribes who've come down from Jerusalem to check out Jesus.

On the surface those groups seem very different, don't they? But how different are these groups in their accusations about Jesus? The structure of this passage, I think, really helps us to understand God's message to us from his word in Mark 3.

There are two sections in the passage. There's the story about Jesus' family, and that's the first couple of verses, verses 20 and 21, and then the last verses, 31 to 35.

And then there's the story about the scribes who come down from Jerusalem claiming that Jesus is possessed by Beelzebub, and Jesus' rebuttal of that, verses 22 to 30.

You see, if you think about it, that structure's a bit like a sandwich, isn't it? It starts and ends with the family. It's an intentional structure, because in the flow of this narrative, the middle part of the sandwich, if you like, that part dealing with the scribes, well, it fills in the time between the family's departure and their arrival.

[3 : 58] But importantly, these two seemingly disconnected stories, they actually make the same point. Both Jesus' closest relatives and the theological specialists down from Jerusalem are wrong about Jesus.

Those in Jesus' family, they declare that he's mad. And that declaration is not unlike the scribes, who attribute his extraordinary powers to an alliance with Beelzebub.

We see this parallel between the two groups in the charges that they make. If you're looking at the text, and I encourage you to do that as we go through, page 814 and 15, notice verse 22 and verse 30.

The family says, he's gone out of his mind. The scribes in verse 30 say, he has an unclean spirit. You see, the charges are common, they're common in their design, to prevent the work, the continuing work and mission of Jesus.

Let's then look at the first scene, the first couple of verses of our passage. The disciples, you recall, were called in those verses 16, 17, 18 and 19 in chapter 3.

[5 : 19] And then we read that at the end of verse 19 that Jesus went home. And it's likely that he went back to Simon Peter's house that we read about earlier in Mark's Gospel, located in Capernaum.

And once again, just like at the beginning of chapter 2, when there was that amazing miracle of the man being lowered down through the roof, you're recalling that there was this huge crowd that gathered at the house.

Well, that's the same now. In fact, Mark tells us at the end of verse 22 that the crowd was so large that Jesus and the disciples could not even find space to eat.

As I was reflecting on that through the week, the thought struck me, I mean, given that, who really needs Jenny Craig? I mean, you could either just simply rent a great big crowd, or maybe even better, just simply have a house with a very small kitchen so you can't get into the cupboards.

Well, Mark again shows us that these crowds, they're an obstacle. They're an obstacle to Jesus' mission. They're not an asset. And we know from verse 31 that Jesus' family certainly at least includes his mother and his brothers.

[6 : 28] And they come to Jesus, and this is not a friendly visit. Notice verse 21. Because the verb that's translated there, restrain him, in fact, as that's used through Mark's Gospel, has the sense of seizing forcibly.

This is not a friendly family visit. And the charge that they level at Jesus is that he's insane. If you think about that, I wonder, what's the motivation of the family in making such a charge?

I mean, why is it that they want to silence him? Well, if we were generous to them, it may be because they were concerned about his conflicts with the authorities and wanted to try and minimize them.

I think probably more likely, the family was concerned about their reputation. Jesus was becoming an embarrassment. There are lots of voices in our world, aren't there, that encourage us, that seduce us, in fact, even try to command us not to take Jesus too seriously.

I recall travelling on a long interstate air flight with a business associate. And we'd spent previously many hours together in a board meeting.

[7 : 44] And I was using this travelling time to prepare some material for a Bible study that I was leading back in Brisbane. And the business associate that I was with, we were good friends.

He saw himself as a bit of a father figure to me, always looking out from interest, wanting to dispense some worldly wisdom to me and some of his business acumen, which was pretty good.

Well, in between my Bible study preparation, our conversation had drifted in and out as it's one to do when you're on a long plane flight. And as I was going through this Bible study, I've got the scriptures here and I'm sort of looking at this verse in the New Testament and tracing the theme back through the Old and coming back into the New Testament with great intent and interest.

And I looked out of the corner of my eye and saw that there was a concerned look on my friend's face. Finally, it got the better of me. He said, You know, Rod, I think believing in something is good.

I mean, we've all got to believe in something. But, Rod, it's really important to have balance. I mean, you know what I mean by that, don't you? I mean, just, Rod, don't take this religious stuff too seriously.

[8 : 59] See, friends, in our world, there are lots of voices, lots of voices, encouraging us not to take Jesus too seriously. Now, we'll see in this passage, just this beginning part of the passage, that those who are closest biologically to Jesus, they're mistaken about him.

They're mistaken about him, just as the religious authorities are mistaken about him. See, blood relationship is no substitute for allegiance to Jesus in faith.

Attending a particular church is no substitute for allegiance to Jesus in faith. While the family's left outside, this family is opposing the will of God and they become outsiders.

Think of it this way. They are subverting the mission of God. Well, that's the beginning of scene one. And then the focus moves to scene two in verses 23 to 27.

You recall, as we've been going through Mark's gospel, that there's been really growing conflict, hasn't there, between the religious authorities in that Galilean region, between them and Jesus. In fact, you recall last week that when Jesus healed the man with the withered hand, and I've still got that mental image of the hand being bound up here with a tape, great audio visual, the Pharisees conspired with the Herodians, in fact, to kill him.

[10 : 29] And this growing angst amongst the teachers of the law leads to scribes coming from the heart of religious power, Jerusalem itself, up to Galilee to check him out, to investigate him.

It's interesting that these authorities, they don't have any doubt that Jesus can cast out demons, can cast out evil spirits. You'll recall going back many Sundays now to chapter one of Mark, that Jesus exercised out an unclean spirit from a man who was in the synagogue at Capernaum.

And then lots of people came to Simon Peter's house and he cast out many demons there. And last week, in this huge milling crowd, we also see the exorcism of demons.

So there's no doubting that Jesus has the ability to cast out demons. In fact, back in chapter one, verse 27, when it talks about the demon-possessed man in the synagogue, the implication of that verse is that the religious authorities themselves were unable to exorcise.

See, the issue is not whether Jesus could do it. But by what power did Jesus work miracles? And their charges in verse 22, he has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons, he casts out demons.

[11 : 49] That is an amazing accusation. Not just amazing, because we've used that word through our sermon series. It is a genuinely amazing accusation. It's about as amazing as the family.

He's gone out of his mind. Well, what's meant by this term Beelzebul? The word is a composite. It's made up of two parts. And the first part comes from Baal, meaning Lord.

And it's referring to manifestations of the Canaanite fertility and storm God. And the second part of the word has the sense of temple or exalted house.

And in the New Testament, Beelzebul is recognised as the prince of demons, identified with Satan, the arch ruler of a dynasty of demons and evil spirits.

I was reading a survey that was conducted in America amongst the so-called born-again, or the born-againers, of the American populace. And this group of supposedly Bible-believing, Christ-trusting people were asked to either agree or disagree with the following statement.

[13 : 03] And the statement was, the devil or Satan is not a living being, but is a symbol of evil. Agree or disagree? Well, of the total number responding, 48%, nearly half of them, either agreed that in fact Satan was only symbolic, or they simply didn't know.

Two young boys were walking home from Sunday school and they were sharing the lesson that they'd just had together. In fact, they'd been studying the temptation of Christ in the wilderness. Little Peter says to his friend, John, do you believe all that stuff about the devil?

I mean, do you really think there's a devil? And John looked at him and said, nah, nah, it's just like Santa Claus, it's dad. But unlike little Johnny, scripture is unequivocal about the existence of Satan.

In the Old Testament, he's portrayed as a creature of God, a general adversary, and a legal accuser. And then with cumulative revelation, that is, as we come from Genesis all the way through the New Testament towards the end of the New Testament and the book of Revelation, with cumulative revelation, we see that direct responsibility for evil is attributed to Satan, the arch demon.

So, this accusation of the teachers of the law in verse 22, it's amazing because the real head of the house, Jesus, the head of the household of God, he's being willfully confused with the head of the house of demons.

[14 : 41] And Jesus responds to them, not directly, but he responds to them in parables. And the parables draw out the absurdity of the scribe's accusation.

If you look in that section from verse 23 and the following verses, trust that you're impressed by the cool, unanswerable logic of the Lord.

Think of it, if you like, as two rhetorical questions. Jesus says to them, surely evil, set against evil, can only mean self-destruction.

He's saying to them, is Satan out to defeat himself? You see, it's absurd, isn't it? And Jesus exposes the stupidity of their accusation.

And in doing that, he exposes the evil of the religious leaders' hearts. I think it's useful to reflect on Jesus' teaching method there.

[15 : 43] I mean, we are clearly, as followers of Christ, instructed not to be argumentative as we interact with the world. It's clear in Scripture and particularly in 2 Timothy 2.

But we, as witnesses, need to have clear, careful thinking. Not just simply a group of texts that we throw in the air and hope that they might sort of float down in the right place.

Look at the way Jesus teaches then in verse 27. The strong one is Satan. Satan's house is his domain.

That is, it's the present world. And Satan seeks to hold that secure. But the stronger one is Jesus. He's come from God.

He's invaded Satan's stronghold and he's bound him. In thinking about that, it's important that we consider the nature of exorcisms that were undertaken by Jesus.

[16 : 44] You see, from one perspective, when a demon was exercised out by the Lord, then the person was freed and healed. But from another perspective, that represents the destruction, the plundering of Satan's kingdom.

Jesus is binding the strong man and he's plundering his house. Think of it this way. The kingdom of God is forcefully advancing as Jesus goes around Palestine exercising out unclean spirits, evil spirits, demonic spirits.

back in chapter 1 verse 15, Jesus in fact announced the coming of the kingdom of God. And the coming of the kingdom of God manifested in the ministry of Jesus announces the beginning of the end.

The beginning of the end. The defeat. If you like, the beginning of the total elimination of the kingdom of darkness. The kingdom of the devil.

I trust that that's good news and it excites you. It might be useful just to think for a moment about the nature of victory in a war.

[18 : 02] I mean in a great war there's often one battle which decides the outcome of the war. And after that decisive battle has been fought and won there's little doubt which side is going to win.

But no one can really say at that point how long the war will still go on. I think a classic example of this is the Second World War. The Allies landed along the Normandy coast on the 6th of June 1944.

It was codenamed Operation Overlord and we know it today as the D-Day landings. There were about 6,500 vessels. They brought in 130,000 Allied troops and they landed on five Normandy beaches.

If you've been there I'm sure you'll agree this is a stunning sad sight as you go through those war memorials and cemeteries. And they landed on five beaches codenamed Utah, Omar, Gold, Juno and Sword.

And there was about 12,000 aircraft that provided air superiority bombing the German defences and providing cover. That was D-Day but it was nearly one year later when the Germans unconditionally surrendered.

[19 : 12] That was May 8, 1945, a day that's marked as V-E-Day, that is Victory for Europe Day. You see with our perspective now looking back it's clear that victory was assured on D-Day.

Looking back we can see the inevitability if you like of the final Allied victory. But between D-Day and V-E-Day there was lots of bloody mopping up.

There was still lots of terrible suffering. V-1 rockets were fired into Britain just one week after D-Day, the landings. There was the Battle of the Bulge where 19,000 Americans were killed.

The advance into Germany was stopped for quite some time. There was the slaughter of innocent men and women. in Auschwitz and that continued for four months after D-Day.

After the decisive battle of D-Day there's little doubt which side would be victorious. But at the time no one could say how long the war would go on.

[20 : 26] D-Day, the day of the decisive battle is over. D-Day, the day of victory celebration lies in the future. And in this long drawn out battle between good and evil which is revealed in scripture, the decisive battle was fought, was won by Christ in his death and resurrection.

salvation. But the gospel has also revealed clearly the continued existence of Satan all the way through till the end time, until the second coming of the Lord Jesus.

The devil has been bound but friends, he is on a very long leash, isn't he? We see the evidence of that every day in our lives and in the world around us.

He is still plying his hateful, deadly, life-destroying wares throughout the planet. This parable of the strong man reveals that the coming of the kingdom of God does involve the destruction of the reign of Satan.

But for us, we live in this in-between period, that is, the invading of the kingdom of God and the destruction of the kingdom of darkness.

[21 : 47] And so for us, I guess, to the human eye, you might easily argue it looks like little has changed. It often looks like the kingdom of Satan is unshaken, doesn't it?

But the power of the kingdom of God has invaded the kingdom of Satan. The activity of this power to deliver men and women from satanic rule, it was evidenced in the exorcism of demons.

The whole context of Mark's gospel just emphasizes this. The activity of this power of the kingdom of God was evidenced in the exorcism of demons.

And we don't have time this morning to go into a much bigger topic about spiritual warfare, but many of you will be aware that Ephesians 6 teaches on that, and in that great passage, there's one offensive spiritual warfare weapon, just one that's identified, and it's the word, God's word, the scriptures, the Bible.

We need to, in fact, can I say, we must continue to proclaim the gospel, to proclaim it and live it out. So for all who are here this morning, who love the Lord Jesus as their saviour and Lord, it's actually our duty.

[23 : 12] It's what we're called to do. Well, then Jesus addresses the scribes in verses 28 to 30, and he addresses them and he begins with one of his amen sayings.

It's translated in the NRSV as truly. But this form of address is very special because it denotes that Jesus' words are reliable.

They're true because he's totally committed to doing the will of God. Let me read those verses. Verse 28, Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin.

For they had said, he, that is Jesus, has an unclean spirit. Just raises immediately the question, doesn't it? What is this unforgivable sin? What is this blasphemy against the Holy Spirit which is unforgivable?

Well, to tackle that, can I suggest that we first of all look at what it is not? Because it's not taking the Lord's name in vain, it's not cursing the Holy Spirit, vile though both of those sins are, it's not adultery, it's not sexual perversions of all sorts of kinds, it's not genocide.

[24 : 36] Look at verse 28, it's important not to lose sight of that statement. Truly I tell you, amen, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter.

Indeed, the apostle Paul identifies himself as a former blasphemer in 1 Timothy 1.13. You see, Saul of Tarsus came to a new understanding of who Jesus is.

Consider this, if we're weak we can be encouraged. If we're ignorant, we can be informed. But if we are willfully blind and death and reject help, then simply what can be done?

What is then the unforgivable sin? It's the ongoing, the continual rejection of the witness of the Holy Spirit to the divinity and saviourhood of Jesus Christ.

It's the ongoing, continual rejection of the witness of the Spirit to the divinity and saviourhood of Christ. See, the sworn enemies of Jesus, as we see in the pages of Scripture, they'd shut their eyes to the truth that was literally standing before them.

[25 : 59] They say good is evil in order to turn others away from Jesus, to preserve their own authority, to resist becoming disciples themselves. It's not a single action, it's a continual state of spurning the Spirit's voice.

sin. So, it's best, I think, to understand the unforgivable sin as a deliberate scorning of the power and forgiveness of God.

The sad reality is there are men and there are women who reject the Spirit's testimony regarding their own fallen sinful state and they reject the Spirit's testimony of the person and work of Jesus Christ.

And they do it so constantly that their hearts finally become what? Unable to hear and believe. And the strong warnings in the letter of Hebrews, of which there are many, carry the same message and particularly the warning in Hebrews 6 and the first couple of verses.

Well, maybe as we talk about this topic that so often I think comes up in people's questions. You might be concerned as to whether you've committed some sin that's unpardonable.

[27 : 17] Such a concern, such a worry, in fact, proves that you haven't committed such a sin. You see, someone who is totally insensitive to the Spirit, who puts the work of God, the power of God, as being demonic, then they won't even be conscious of committing the ultimate transgression.

transgression. If today as you reflect and hear these words and you realise that you're not in right relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, let me plead with you today to turn to the Lord Jesus.

Don't continue to reject the love of God that's been manifest in the person of Jesus Christ because we know on the truth of God's word that rejecting the living God is a dangerous thing to do.

Continuing to reject God's revelation to mankind, his revelation in the person of Christ is to head down a terrible path and it's in God's love that he warns us.

He warns us for all who will heed his word. God's will then we come back to scene 1. We revisit scene 1 in verses 31 to 35.

[28 : 37] You see after this slanderous attack of the scribes we're back to the subversion of the family. The family is outside the house and they're calling Jesus they want to take him away.

Remember back in verse 21 their charge their accusation is that he's in fact insane. Jesus responds to those who are sitting around him in verse 33.

Who are my mother and my brothers? And looking at those who sat around him he said here are my brother my mother and my brothers.

Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother. When you think about that don't get this wrong. Jesus is not against nuclear families.

In fact right through the New Testament there is strong affirmation of the critical role the important role of families. But the point is this you don't get into the kingdom of God by being born into a particular family.

[29 : 38] You don't get into the kingdom of God by attending a particular church. Being a Christian being a follower of Jesus it's not genetic. But the great news is that anyone can in fact be an insider.

Anyone can be part of Jesus true family. How does that happen you might ask? The passage simply tells us by doing the will of God.

What's the will of God then? It's gathering around Jesus. We've seen it week in and week out haven't we as we've gone through Mark's Gospel. Gathering around Jesus is repenting of our sins, turning away from our self-centered life and trusting in Jesus Christ, God's only son.

And that's the message in fact that Jesus continued to proclaim as he went through the land of Palestine. And it was Paul's message that he proclaimed as he went out with the Gospel and that famous address in Athens when he stands on Mars Hill, the Areopagus in Athens, and he proclaims to the people and at the end of that address in Acts 17 it's the same message, repent and trust in God's son.

And so that's God's message to Australia. And we can be certain it's God's message to us as we gather here at Holy Trinity Doncaster this Sunday.

[31 : 07] So as we read these opening chapters of Mark's Gospel, each of us are compelled to answer the very basic question. Who is this man?

Who is this Jesus of Nazareth? Is he a lunatic? Is he demon possessed? Or is he in fact the son of God?

Well this morning if you know in your heart that you're not right with God and if you're not right with God you will know that in your heart. Let me encourage you to respond to him today.

Don't put it off. Don't say maybe next Sunday maybe another time. Continual rejection of the Lordship of Jesus Christ is an extraordinary dangerous path to continue to travel down.

God's but for the many Christians and brothers and sisters who are gathered here this morning I hope as you go back through this passage that you're excited about that wonderful fact that the kingdom of God is breaking in where actually every Christian is called to be part of that activity.

[32 : 26] The gospel is powerful. It does transform. And what a tremendous privilege each of us have to be proclaimers of the glorious good news of Jesus Christ.

Father we thank you for your word. We thank you that it's a powerful word. We thank you for your powerful spirit. Father we thank you that in your love you sent the Lord Jesus Christ to our fallen sinful world.

Father I thank you that the devil has been bound. I thank you that decisive victory was won in Jesus' death and resurrection.

Father we see all around us the reality though of the continued harm and destruction that the devil and the rest of the fallen angels have seek to do in our world.

Lord I pray that we would genuinely be excited that the kingdom of God was brought in in Jesus' life and ministry and continues to break in.

[33 : 42] Lord I pray that we would be focused on the Lord that we would not lose hope as we see much mayhem around us. That we would continue to look forward with great anticipation to the certainty of Christ's return and Lord that we would see that in your extraordinary grace that you've called us, you've chosen us with all of our failings, with all of our faults, with all of our weaknesses to be proclaimers of the gospel, the powerful gospel, the gospel that transforms lives.

Lord might that be just the daily living out of each believer who is here this morning and Lord for anyone here who is not in right relationship with the Lord Jesus, I pray that they would yield to the Holy Spirit this morning, that they would turn around from their stubborn selfish way of life and embrace the Lord Jesus, put their faith and trust in him and Lord we thank you that in your mercy and in your grace on the assurance of scripture that you will forgive such a man or such a woman.

We ask these things in the powerful name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.