

Mark 3:7-35

Introduction.

Have you ever drawn the wrong conclusion about someone or something? Perhaps it was neighbour who gave you a bad first impression, but then turned out to be lovely. Perhaps it was a TV series that you thought would be boring and dry, but actually turned out to be gripping and funny. Sometimes our wrong conclusions are of no major consequence. But sometimes they are.

This was certainly true for the twelve publishing companies who decided to reject J.K. Rowling's synopsis of her first Harry Potter novel (Harry Potter and the Philosopher's stone). Believe it or not, the first twelve publishers that J.K Rowling went to all concluded that her work was not worth investing in. They all wrote it off for various reasons:

- Too conventional.
- Too weird.
- Too long.
- Too old-fashioned.

It wasn't until Rowling approached Bloomsbury Publishing that she found someone who concluded that her work was worth investing in. And boy did that investment pay off.

The Harry Potter series went on to become the best-selling book series in History (over 500 million copies sold). Bloomsbury's partnership with Rowling made them famous and massively rich.

Reflecting on his decision to go with Harry Potter, the CEO of Bloomsbury (Nigel, Newton) said:

"We don't know what will become bestsellers and what won't, but we do know what are good books."

Sometimes the conclusions we make really do matter.

And it's like that with Jesus. The conclusions we reach about Him really do matter. It's not inconsequential. In fact, to reach the wrong conclusion about Jesus would be infinitely worse than being one of the 12 publishers who passed up J.K. Rowling. But to reach the right conclusion about who Jesus is, what He's come to do, and why it's worth listening to Him – well that is infinitely and eternally better than anything Bloomsbury experienced.

In tonight's passage, Mark gives us a picture of the differing conclusions people reach about Jesus and His ministry. As Jesus and his new band of apostles become more well-known in the public eye, Mark wants his readers to see the ways people got it wrong and got it right about Jesus in his own day. And we need to learn from that so that we draw the right conclusions about Jesus and ultimately find a place in God's family forever.

The way I've broken the passage up is to look first at the

- The growing interest in Jesus (vv.7-12).
- The new community of Jesus (vv.13-19).
- The different conclusions about Jesus (vv.20-35).

1. The Growing interest in Jesus (vv.7-12)

So, first, let's look at the growing interest in Jesus seen in the huge crowds that follow Him.

The MCG has long been associated with blockbuster sporting events that have attracted huge crowds. But did you know that the event that still holds the attendance record for the MCG was not a sporting event but a preaching event? In 1959, the American evangelist, Billy

Graham, came and preached the good news about Jesus at the MCG and attracted somewhere between 130-140 000 people. Now, while this is a pretty epic record, the idea of large crowds coming to hear about Jesus is nothing new actually. In fact, as we see here that it was happening in Jesus own day as he preached about Himself, and demonstrated his miraculous power. We see that at the beginning of our passage. Three times Mark tells us how large the crowds around Jesus were.

*⁷ Jesus departed with his disciples to the sea, and a **large** crowd followed from Galilee, and a **large** crowd followed from Judea, ⁸ Jerusalem, Idumea, beyond the Jordan, and around Tyre and Sidon. The **large** crowd came to him because they heard about everything he was doing.*

News of Jesus ministry was spreading like wildfire. Everyone was coming from everywhere to hear him, to see him, and to be healed by him. The crowds are so large Jesus has to jump into a boat on a lake just to avoid getting crushed (v.9)!

But's it's not just the physically sick getting healed by Jesus in this moment. Verse 11 tells us it's the spiritually sick too – those poor souls possessed by evil spirits.

¹¹ Whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, "You are the Son of God!" ¹² And he would strongly warn them not to make him known.

Now, here's a question for us... Why, with such a captive audience does Jesus choose *not* to reveal His true identity as the Son of God? It seems a little odd. Now, if you've read Mark's

gospel before, you'll know that Jesus does this on a number of other occasions during his public ministry.

Well, to I think Jesus does this, in order to prevent people misunderstanding His role and Him reaching the wrong conclusion about who he is.

You see, the term Son of God was often associated with the promised Messiah (cf. Luke 4:41) – the promised King of Israel who God would send to save His people. Now, when the Jews of Jesus' day thought 'Messiah' they thought “conquering King who would drive out their Roman oppressors.” They didn't think “suffering servant who would be killed by their Roman oppressors.”

Jesus wanted *time* to teach people, especially those who wanted to know him beyond His miracles, that He *would* be that conquering King *but only by* being that suffering servant - dying for sin, rising to life and defeating the greater enemies of death and the devil.

If people knew that Jesus was God's saviour, without knowing how and from what He would save them, they would be a recipe for a wrong conclusions – and Jesus does not want this.

And we are all capable – even those who attend church – of drawing the wrong conclusions about Jesus and His mission:

- We can hear the name “Jesus” and think “healer, who will fix my back issues.”
- We can hear the name “Jesus” and think “life coach” who will make me a better person.”
- We can hear the name “Jesus” and think holy prophet, but not God.”

This is why, at Bundy, we will always encourage you to join a mid-week bible study – or one-to-one bible reading with someone. We need opportunities to keep listening to Jesus, in His word so that we allow *Him* set us straight about who He really is so that we don't draw the wrong conclusions.

2. The New Community of Jesus (vv.13-18)

Second, the new community of Jesus. As public interest grows in Jesus forms His band of disciples who he makes his own and commissions to minister His gospel with Him. Look at verse 13

¹³ Jesus went up the mountain and summoned those he wanted, and they came to him. ¹⁴ He appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles,^[a] to be with him, to send them out to preach, ¹⁵ and to have authority to^[b] drive out demons. ¹⁶ He appointed the Twelve:^[c] To Simon, he gave the name Peter; ¹⁷ and to James the son of Zebedee, and to his brother John, he gave the name “Boanerges” (that is, “Sons of Thunder”); ¹⁸ Andrew; Philip and Bartholomew; Matthew and Thomas; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot, ¹⁹ and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him.

Most of us have belonged to some kind of club or community group. Our society is full of them.

There are sporting clubs and craft clubs.

When I was at Uni, the choice was endless. I remember there was even a club called the “more beer club.”

In a world full of community groups – both in person and online – what makes the community of Jesus – which started with these disciples’ and now includes us – so special?

Well, it's because this group, unlike any other community in the world, belongs to God.

Jesus makes this clear in the deliberate parallels he draws with the formation of God's people, Israel, in the OT.

Just as God had called the *twelve* tribes of Israel into covenant relationship with Him on the Mountain of Sinai, so too Jesus calls the 12 apostles into relationship with Him on a mountain (v.13). The symbolism is clear – these apostles and all who believe in their authoritative teaching about Jesus, are now made members of *God's* people and included in the Kingdom of God. Such people join a community in which Jesus imparts to them God's forgiveness, God's Spirit, God's eternal life. Bloomsbury's relationship with Rowling won't last forever. Our relationship with God will.

It's a wonderful and amazing thing to be included in God's family. But here's the important thing, you cannot enter this community unless you come to the *right* conclusion about who Jesus is. Unless you see Him as the One *He* claims to be – the Son of God, who dies for sins and rises again – you will never be a part of it.

Everything hinges on making the right conclusions about Jesus.

C.S. Lewis famously wrote that there are generally speaking really only three conclusions people can draw about Jesus when they actually see that he claimed to be the Son of God, rather than just a moral teacher. Lewis argued that such a big claim by Jesus warrants the big conclusion that Jesus is either a lunatic, a liar, or the Lord.

He writes:

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,

Mark now shows us three different conclusions that basically follow this pattern. Jesus' family think he's mad and the religious guys think he's bad. And in the final scene people are at Jesus feet listening to Him as they should be for He is their Lord and God.

Whether you're new to Christianity or have been a Christian for a long time, we can actually all learn from these three different conclusions. So let's think about each one.

1. *The conclusion that Jesus is mad.*

First, Mark warns us against the wrong conclusion of thinking Jesus is mad. Look at verse 20:

²⁰ Jesus entered a house, and the crowd gathered again so that they were not even able to eat. ²¹ When his family heard this, they set out to restrain him, because they said, "He's out of his mind."

Now, we expect the suspicious religious leaders to be calling Jesus "mad," but it shocks us to learn that it was actually Jesus' own *family* who were making this call! His own family were literally saying, "He's out of his mind."

They've heard about the miracles, the teaching, the huge crowds. I suspect they've heard about his conflict with the religious rulers – and they think: "Things are getting out of

control. He's losing the plot, making enemies with powerful people!" This is why they come to "restrain him" (v.21).

You can imagine them sidleing up beside Jesus: "Come along now, it's time to go. We can talk about all these things in the privacy at home."

Now, as much as we can might understand where Jesus' family is coming from, Mark is telling us that there is a problem with it. At a fundamental level, Jesus' family is saying they know better Jesus. They draw the conclusion that they are the sane one and He is the crazy man.

The fact that this came from Jesus' own family reminds us that it is possible to feel close to Jesus, assume you're part of his crew and yet still get things tragically wrong about him. It's not so much we think of Jesus as a bad guy, but someone who just doesn't really understand the way of things. Someone we need to "restrain in certain" areas. What might it be for you?

"Jesus is great, but his message that He is the only way to God is nuts!"

"Jesus is lovely, but his suggestion *every* person is sinner is a little misguided."

"I love Jesus, but his words about human sexuality are just outdated, and need updating."

"Yeah, I'm a Christian, I'm just not convinced Jesus was entirely serious when he said love your enemies." That's kind of crazy."

If Jesus own family can get this wrong, we can get this wrong. Now, in time, Jesus family does come around, but it's important to note that at this stage, their attitude towards Jesus is keeping them on the outside of His new community. We see that in the last verses where

Jesus contrasts *them* (who are standing *outside*, v.31), with those who He considers his true family, listening to Him on the inside (v.34). But more about that soon.

It is not possible to be a member of Jesus' people and conclude (at any level) that he is mad and cannot be trusted.

But there is another more sinister conclusion that Mark warns us about. And that is to conclude that Jesus is bad.

2. *The conclusion that Jesus is bad.*

Notice how Mark jumps immediately to another wrong conclusion about Jesus before actually finishing the story about Jesus' family. He is keen to show two bad conclusions side by side.

Now, this conclusion comes from the religious scribes who like the Pharisees of last week had grown to hate Jesus. He didn't play by their religious rules, he was claiming to have God's authority to forgive sin. He was calling sinners, not the supposed "righteous" into God's kingdom and community. Look at the conclusion they draw about Jesus off the back of reports he was casting out demons. Verse 22:

²² The scribes who had come down from Jerusalem said, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and, "He drives out demons by the ruler of the demons."

Now, just let that accusation sink in for a second. These guys are basically saying that what is good is actually bad. "Don't believe your lying eyes people! It's *because* he is possessed

that he can dispossess others. He's not working by the power of God, but of Satan! Don't you see!?"

So how does Jesus respond?

He points out how the accusation simply doesn't make any sense. Verse 23:

²³ So he summoned them and spoke to them in parables: "How can Satan drive out Satan? ²⁴ If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵ If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. ²⁶ And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand but is finished.

"What sort of winning strategy is that!? What sort of King goes around killing all his foot-soldiers in order to win a war?" It makes no sense! "A Kingdom divided cannot stand."

Jesus's works aren't evidence that He's in league with Satan. They are evidence that He's opposing him! Bursting into his domain, binding him up and plundering from him all those poor people he has taken captive. Look at verse 27:

²⁷ But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he can plunder his house.

Jesus has come to give life, not take it. He's come to rescue people from the dominion of darkness and into His kingdom of light (Col 1:13).

The conclusion of the Scribes was ridiculous as it was personally condemning for them.

Look at the chilling words Jesus says to them:

²⁸ “Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for all sins and whatever blasphemies they utter. ²⁹ But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin” — ³⁰ because they were saying, “He has an unclean spirit.”

It’s worth pausing to reflect a little on Jesus words’ about blasphemy of the HS – which is often referred to as the “unforgivable sin.”

I wonder if any of you have ever worried that you’ve committed this unforgivable sin? If you have, you’re not alone. Christians throughout church history have worried that they have either willingly or unwilling have blasphemed the HS and have lost the hope of forgiveness.

I discovered in my reading this week, that this was a particular concern for many of the 17th and 18th century Puritan Christians. One of the English Puritans, John Child, became so convinced that he had committed this sin that that he descended into a pit of despair he and took his life, believing it was no longer worth living.

So what is blasphemy of the Holy Spirit? There are a few things I want to say about this:

1. *Not moment of sin, but a hardened heart.*

People sometimes think that Blasphemy against the HS refers to a moment in which you curse God, perhaps in an emotional outburst. And because it's unforgivable, you don't get forgiveness, no matter how much you plead for it. This is where the distress comes.

In this way of thinking you see yourself like a guy hopelessly banging on God's door, begging for forgiveness, but he's shut his ears to you. But notice in verse 29, Jesus doesn't say, that a person will be denied forgiveness, but that they simply "never have it."

And that's because it's the person who has shut their ears to Jesus, not the other way round. To blaspheme against the HS is a settled decision of the heart to walk away from the only source of forgiveness... which is Jesus. That's a picture of the Scribes. Throughout Mark's gospel their rejection of Jesus is not pictured as a moment of thoughtlessness, but a settled and hardened rejection of Jesus *after* they had witnessed all he had said and done. They had become comfortable with their conclusion that his works were from the evil one not from God's Spirit.

So, it's not like the guy banging on the door... The door to Jesus' forgiveness is always open (v.28 says all sins can be forgiven). It's actually more like a person who has decided to walk away from that door and never return to it.

Jesus is warning us against committing the sin of religious people. Being the kind of person who knows about Jesus and his gospel, but makes the conclusion that "it's not for me" – and walks away from Him. I think this is what Hebrews 6 is talking about:

⁴ For it is impossible to renew to repentance those who were once enlightened, who tasted the heavenly gift, who shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵ who tasted God's good word and the powers of the coming age, ⁶ and who have fallen away.

How does someone have forgiveness when they reject the only One who can give it to them?

It's a scary sin to contemplate. But, it's a sin that happens within the church. I don't know about you but over the past few years I've noticed a number of former high-profile Christians who have done this and advocated for it via social media. These people don't call it blasphemy of the HS. They call it Christian Deconstructionism. The process by which you deconstruct all the unhelpful ways of thinking you had as a follower of Jesus and set your mind free to live apart from Him.

Joshua Harris is a high-profile example of this. After decades in Christian ministry he speaks of "deconstructing his faith". He now no longer considers himself a Christian and for a time there, actually set up a course to help others who may want to deconstruct their faith too.

There is another former Christian writer who is also the son of a well-known Pastor. Over the past year he has taken to tiktok to make the "deconstruction of his faith" known. In one video he contrasts what he sees as the fear and guilt of Christianity with the comfortable meaningless of the universe:

*"Nothing really matters," "And this is what gives us the freedom to feel our own meaning, and feel it with ease, instead of a sense of fear or guilt. This, my friends, is the mother**** gospel."*

Blasphemy of the HS is not so much the sin of saying those words per se, but the hardened heart that lays behind it. It's the conclusion that the gospel of Jesus – which the person has tasted of - is not really good news at all and should be rejected.

We always pray that God brings someone back from that position. But the warnings of scripture and the experience of church history, suggest that many remain comfortable in that position for good. We don't want to go there. We don't want to exclude ourselves from the community of God's forgiven people.

2. *Don't miss the comfort of Jesus' words.*

So what if you're someone who is worried that you've committed the unforgivable sin?

I think it's fair to say that if you're worried you have committed the unforgivable sin, you haven't committed it. No, one who has a Scribe-like hardness of heart worries that they have sinned against Jesus.

It's easy to get so caught up in Jesus' talk of a sin that never has forgiveness, that we miss the great promise of verse 28 – that people will be forgiven “for all sins and whatever blasphemies they utter.” Jesus is actually saying to those of you who *are* distressed about something terrible you've said or done against God, that there *is* forgiveness. Jesus is abundantly merciful and will always forgive those who seek it (the door is open not closed to you). So, if you're anxious about this, I want to be clear:

- Jesus *will* forgive that time you got angry at God and made all sorts of derogatory comments about him.
- Jesus *will* forgive that time you made an irreverent joke at His expense.
- Jesus *will* forgive the shame you feel for that moment you denied Jesus in front of your work-colleagues.

- Jesus *will* forgive that period you went through in which you doubted him and dabbled with the world.

Jesus will never turn away an anxious soul, who recognises sin, and seeks out His forgiveness: “People will be forgiven for all sins and whatever blasphemies they utter.”

There is comfort in Jesus word’s as well as the clear warning not to conclude Jesus is a bad thing.

So, Mark has presented us with two wrong and devastating conclusions we can make about Jesus. That he’s mad and that he’s bad. But in the last few verses we see the kind of conclusion, the attitude that we should reflect when it comes to Jesus.

And that is the conclusion that says believes Jesus is worth listening to.

3. *Jesus is worth listening to.*

Read with me from v.31:

³¹ *His mother and his brothers came, and standing outside, they sent word to him and called him. ³² A crowd was sitting around him and told him, “Look, your mother, your brothers, and your sisters^[1] are outside asking for you.”*

³³ *He replied to them, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” ³⁴ Looking at those sitting in a circle around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! ³⁵ Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”*

Now, it's easy to read these words and think Jesus is being kind of harsh to his family. But, the gospels leave us in no doubt that Jesus loved his family. In fact, you see the depths of Jesus love for his mother, when on the cross, he tells the apostle John to care for her like she was his own mother.

Jesus' words here don't convey his lack of concern for his family. Rather, they show the amazing depth of relationship Jesus' people have with Jesus and therefore God. They are His true, spiritual family.

I remember a slogan that the RACV used to use on their TV ads when I was a kid. It said, "you're a member, not a number" – I.e. "we don't just consider you an impersonal code on a computer system, you're a valued part of our community." Jesus is saying something even more than this.. "You not just member, you're a brother, or a sister."

Just let that sink in. The incarnate Lord of the universe considers you a family member, someone He loves deeply, someone He fights for, someone He's willing to die for – which He does, at the cross for your sins. It is a wonderful thing for the Son of God to say: "You are my family."

So, what are these people around Jesus getting right that puts them in this family? Well, I think the answer is that they are simply listening to Jesus – not dismissing Him as crazy. Not rejecting him as possessed. Listening to Him.

That's what it means to do the will of God (v.31). And if we want clearer evidence that listening to Jesus is God's will – we just have to flick ahead to Mark 9 where the voice of God breaks forth through the cloud and says of Jesus:

“This is my beloved Son: *Listen to Him!*”

God’s will is that we listen to Jesus – Recognising him to be God’s Son and believing Him when He calls us to trust Him as both the saviour from our sin and the Lord of our lives.

Maybe, you’re here tonight and you’re not yet a Christian, but you want to keep listening to Jesus, hearing more of his good news that saves you. You might like to sign up to CE which is beginning in a week or two. Just let us know via our website.

But to the rest of you, let this final picture of people sitting around Jesus be an encouragement for you to do likewise this year. God’s will is that we gather as His family around our Lord and listen to Him. This is what we do every week as we open the Bible and hear Christ speak to us. That is what we need more than anything in this year, It’s Christ’s word.

- His word will encourage us to keep trusting God when the next curve ball of covid comes our way.
- His word will comfort us with the hope of eternal life when we faced with the sickness and death of this world.
- His word will assure us of our salvation, when we feel grieved by sin.
- His word will help us to love one another when we find that tough.

Let’s keep making the right conclusion about Jesus this year. He’s not mad. He’s not bad.

He’s the Son of God, who died and rose again and is worth listening to.

Let’s pray.