

For some, Jesus is like a heavenly vending machine. If you have enough faith, Jesus will give you whatever you can imagine. He promises wealth, health, and prosperity. Proponents of this “gospel” teach that a believing Christian is free to live above the realities of pain and suffering in this world. For some, Jesus is a political revolutionary and liberationist. For others He has no interest in politics whatsoever. Many more see Jesus as a teacher of peace and love and the unfortunate victim of powerful forces at work in the world beyond His control. These portraits of Jesus remind me one who is looking for Jesus at the bottom of a well only to discover his own reflection.

Our Scripture text for this morning reveals two early false conclusions about Jesus made by the religious leaders and members of His own family. This morning I want us to consider:

First, two false conclusions about Jesus.

Second, the real Jesus.

And **Third**, what we may become if we acknowledge who Jesus really is.

First, What were the two false conclusions people made about Jesus?

I. Jesus: Satan’s Agent

The first false theory, advanced by the religious leaders, was that Jesus was an agent of Satan. After naming and commissioning the twelve disciples, Jesus returned to Capernaum. When the news got out, the crowds once again pressed in against each other inside the house. Let’s come back to His family’s conclusions in a moment. For now, notice the religious leaders’ statements about Jesus. Verse 22 says, “The scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, ‘He is possessed by Beelzebub...He casts out demons by the ruler of the demons.’” Now, if a delegation comes down from Jerusalem and makes statements with such finality, it has the ring of an ecclesiastical or official decision. This was the way the religious establishment in Jerusalem decided to deal with Jesus. They would say that He was possessed by Beelzebub. Beelzebub was the name of a Canaanite deity known as the Prince of Demons. They said, “Sure, Jesus does supernatural things, but He’s posing as an angel of light. He is really possessed by the devil. He’s deceiving you.”

Jesus responds, “How can Satan cast out Satan?” Their conclusion is nonsensical. Many of Jesus’ miracles involved casting demons out of people! He waged war against Satan and debilitated the power of his demons. Does it make any sense that if Jesus were on Satan’s side, He would be waging war against him and casting out his agents? Then Jesus said, “A kingdom can’t stand if it is divided against itself, A house can’t stand if its members destroy each other. And if Satan rises up only to take himself down, how is it possible for him to remain standing?” Here Jesus compares the world to a kingdom or to a house, which has been dominated by an evil warlord. A general never wins by attacking his own troops. The suggestion is ridiculous. If Satan is taking Satan down and plundering Satan’s house then he is finished. Such conclusions just do not make sense. Jesus goes on to tell us more about His true identity.

The Real Jesus:

Jesus said, “No one can enter the strong man’s house and plunder his property unless he first binds the strong man and then he will plunder his house.” Jesus paints a picture of a wicked prince who has taken all sorts of prisoners captive in his castle. In reality, He was alluding to this world, which is in captivity to sin, death and evil forces. He is giving notice that *He* has come to bind the strong man of this world. Jesus came to do battle with the forces of evil and to release those who have been taken captive to his influence, which is the whole world. Think of the world with its brokenness, sin, death, injustice, prejudice, and the raw evil we see around us. Look, I love schoolteachers and have enormous respect for them. However, do you think a teacher is going to overcome all of that with class lessons on love and peace? This diagnosis of the world is too

optimistic and too flattering. As wonderful as education is, the problems of the world run much deeper than our need for education.

More than any other name, Jesus used the name Son of Man to describe Himself. In Daniel 7, the Lord prophesied that a divine King, called the Son of Man, would come to judge the earth at the end of time. This “Ancient of Days” was given dominion, glory, and a kingdom where all the peoples and nations would serve Him. His dominion was to be everlasting and indestructible. No one in the ancient world thought education alone could ever achieve this outcome. Jesus came to do something for us and on our behalf. *Before we can be taught, we must be rescued and delivered!*

The first prophesy about this rescuer is found in Genesis 3:15-16. After Adam and Eve went their own way, the human race agonized in ruins. Instigated by the poisonous lies of the serpent, Paradise was lost. The human race became captive to fear, accusation, blame, sin, shame, and alienation. These heartbreaks overwhelmed our first parents. Tim Keller says, “The wind was howling and darkness came on the face of the earth.” God turned to the serpent and prophesied, “One mightier than you will come. Yes, you will bruise His heel but He will crush your head. Your triumph will be momentary. One greater than you will come, plunder you, and take over your kingdom. He will liberate your captives and renew the face of the earth.” Prophets and the Psalmists also predicted the coming of a divine Warrior king who would come and defeat the forces of evil. The Lord himself would come and bind the strong man and set Israel free.

Yet, as Israel became complicit in sin with the sins of other nations, Jeremiah writes, “The Lord has strung His bow against us! The Lord has withdrawn His right hand and His hand is now against us!” So what happens when believers, in God, join in with the sins of the world? When God comes, how will He defeat evil and still save us? If He comes in righteousness, He will either have to accept us and let evil be or He will have to crush evil and crush us along with it. We are all complicit in sin. How is God going to defeat evil and still save us? Jesus is saying, “I have come to do just that. I am the one who will come, plunder the strong man’s castle, bind the strong man and open the prison doors. The problem of rescuing sinful humanity before a righteous God will be resolved in Me.”

Who is Jesus? Beloved, He is stronger than the forces of wickedness; He casts out demons. He is stronger than death; he raises the dead. He is stronger than sin; He forgives sin. He is stronger than sickness; He heals the sick. He has come as Immanuel with all of God’s power. And, He uses that power to bind the forces of wickedness and to set the captives free. He is the fulfillment of Israel’s most ancient and precious prophesies. If you know Jesus, do you know that you are free? Are you laying hold of that liberating reality? From what do you need to be freed today?

The Unforgiveable Sin:

This is the context of His comments about the unforgiveable sin. The point of the unpardonable sin is that the Holy Spirit *of God* was at work in Jesus as He cast out demons and healed people. This was God with us fulfilling His word of promise. To accuse Jesus of doing His work by the devil, reversing good and evil and concluding that Jesus’ power is wicked is unforgiveable because it rejects the very agent of God’s forgiveness. The phrase “they were saying” in v. 30, is in the imperfect tense, which means they were repeating these things from a settled conviction. This was an ecclesiastical decision. If you are worried about committing it, you haven’t. The sin against the Holy Spirit is a fixed and hardened conviction that Jesus, who worked His miracles by the power of God’s Spirit, is instead the agent of Satan. It is unforgiveable precisely because it rejects God’s agent of forgiveness calling him the devil. The truth is that Jesus is Satan’s worst nightmare. On the cross, He crushed Satan’s tyrannical power and served him a fatal blow. To say that Jesus was possessed of the devil was a clever theory, but one that was blind to all the facts about Jesus. His life didn’t advance Satan’s cause; instead, it destroyed it.

Jesus: Insane

Second, what about the conclusion of Jesus' family? Verse 21 says, "When His own family heard about this, they went out to take custody of Him; for they were saying, 'He has lost his mind.'" Also, in v. 31, we read, "And His mother and His brothers arrived, and standing outside they sent word to Him and called Him...and they said, Your mother and your brothers are outside looking for you."

Wow! What must it have been like for Jesus to have His immediate family conclude that He was insane? Verse 21 reveals that His mother and brothers came to take Jesus by force. Try to imagine how Jesus felt. The leaders of the church He loved hated Him, accused Him of being possessed by the devil, and were plotting to have Him killed. Most of the people only wanted to be with Him because of what He could do for them. His closest disciples thought He was going to bring Israel political liberation from the Roman occupiers. Now His family members plan an intervention to take charge of Him by force. Do you think that was hard to bear?

Walk in His family's sandals for a moment. What if you had a relative who went around saying, "I've always existed. I was around before Abraham was. I was present before the creation of the universe. When Satan fell from heaven, I was there and I saw that. I am the Lord of the Sabbath. You should worship Me as you worship the Father. Everything I do the Father does. Destroy the temple and in three days, I will raise it up again. And, by the way, your eternal destiny is dependent on your relationship with me." These were extravagant things to say! The hostility they caused among the religious leaders had reached the boiling point. His family concluded that Jesus must have lost His mind and that He was going to get Himself killed. Clearly, He can't see what is inevitable.

II. The Real Jesus

How many insane people have organized, led, and inspired people who were committed to doing good, living righteously, with integrity, committed to relieving suffering, advocating the rights of the poor and the needy, defending the rights of the elderly and orphans? How many insane people led in the establishment of organizations committed to justice, equality, service, healing, and to feeding the poor? If only all leaders could be so insane. Jesus was not insane. He was the most emotionally stable person who ever walked the earth. These were the two theories about Jesus on that day: Jesus was Satan personified or He was insane.

A Modern Theory About Jesus

Our day has produced another alternative. Today Jesus is cast as a teacher of peace and love. We conveniently leave aside His role as judge of the earth, who does battle with Satan and sin, and one who will someday separate the sheep from the goats assigning some to hell and some to heaven. In our day, we are more comfortable with a Jesus who teaches us about peace and love than we are with a Jesus who calls us to flee the wrath to come.

And here's how it is done in our day. Today, many just pick and choose what they like about the Scriptures and leave what they don't like. Others say that the Jesus of the Gospels is not the real Jesus. They say that by the time the Gospels were written, the stories had become legends. Yet it takes time for legends to develop and the Gospels were all written during the lifetime of the eyewitnesses. The Gospel writers simply could not have gotten away with legendary stories. There were too many people alive who could have contradicted it.

Others tell us that the early church conspired to hide the real Jesus who has now been discovered in the Gnostic Gospels. Gnosticism was a Greek philosophy saying that the physical world is evil and that salvation is the release of the soul from the physical body. Listen to one piece that I think will help you see why they were not considered Christian. This is taken from the Gospel of Thomas,

Simon Peter said, 'Let Mary leave our company for women are not worthy of life.' Jesus said, 'Behold, I shall make Mary male that she may also become a living spirit like you males. For every woman who makes herself male shall enter into the kingdom of heaven.'¹[1]

The fact the alleged author is Jesus' "twin brother" might give one pause. Is there any wonder why the early Christians rejected this as gospel? There are no credible New Testament scholars who think that the Gnostic Gospels represented first c. Christianity.

That Jesus was possessed by the devil, that He was insane, or that what you are reading about Jesus in the Gospels did not really take place, are more difficult to believe than what the Gospels reveal. Jesus said He was the Lion of the tribe of Judah who would crush Satan under His feet. He also said that He was the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He claimed to be the rightful Prince and King of the universe and yet, He took the form of a slave. He accepted worship from those who bowed at His feet and yet He washed the disciples' feet. He preached judgment and the reality of hell and He preached forgiveness and mercy and the reality of heaven for those who believe in Him. This persistent combination of "Sun and Frost, Frost and Sun"²[2], eventually broke open the hearts of His followers to the reality of Jesus' true identity. He is everything good, right, courageous, loving, powerful, and humble that your heart could ever dream of and more. He was not in league with the devil. He was not insane. He was not a victim of more powerful forces at work in the world. Jesus is the Son of God and Savior of the World who came to rescue us from our captivity to sin and Satan.

III. What may we become, who believe in Jesus AS HE IS?

Lastly, Mark concludes this episode with a promise about who can be a member of Jesus' ultimate family. In verse 33ff, when the crowd told Him that His family was outside looking for Him, Jesus asked, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And He looked at those around Him and said, "Behold my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother, sister and mother." (35). Family is the place where love and acceptance are most to be found. Yet, His own family was not able to embrace His claims.

His life here once again has parallels to the life of King David who said in Ps. 27:10, "even though my father and mother reject me, you O Lord will lift me up." When Samuel told Jesse to bring his sons to anoint one of them the next king, Jesse left David at home. No one imagined that David would ever be king. Few imagined that Jesus was the true Messiah and those who did wanted Him to be king merely to fulfill their personal and national ambitions. His family concluded He was out of His mind. Jesus asked, "Who is my family?" Then pointing to those who were listening to Him, He said, "Whoever who does the will of God, he is My brother, sister and mother." Jesus offers a love that even surpasses the love or lack of it in a family. If we believe in Him and do what the Lord says, Jesus folds us up into His eternal family with bonds deeper than blood. That can be so because Jesus defeated the tyrannical power of evil on the cross. Jesus defeated evil by becoming a servant. He did so by losing His life. It is counter intuitive. However, at the cross, Satan was so decisively defeated that John says that Satan cannot now even touch a member of Jesus' family (1John 5:18). No one can ever love you like Jesus no matter what your family experience has been: good or bad. And when He touches you with a love like His, Satan can never touch you again.

1[1] *Gospel of Thomas* , Saying 114 [3]:

2[2]From a sermon on Jesus by Dr. Tim Keller.

In the first Harry Potter book Voldermort, who is the personification of evil told his host Quirrel to kill Harry,

SEIZE HIM!" And, the next second, Harry felt Quirrell's hands close on his wrist. He (Harry) yelled, struggling with all his might, and to his surprise, Quirrell let go of him. He looked around wildly to see where Quirrell had gone and saw him hunched in pain, looking at his fingers - they were blistering before his eyes. Later, in the infirmary, Harry asked Dumbledore about Quirrel's blistering hands. Dumbledore said to Harry:

Your mother died to save you. If there is one thing Voldemort cannot understand, it is love. He didn't realize that love as powerful as your mother's for you leaves its own mark. It's not a scar or a visible sign ... to have been loved so deeply, even though the person who loved us is gone, will give us some protection forever. It is in your very skin. Quirrell, full of hatred, greed and ambition, sharing his soul with Voldemort, could not touch you for this reason. It was agony to touch a person marked by something so good."³₃

Jesus Christ has loved us so much that it becomes an agony for Satan to touch a person with evil who has been marked by something so good. Beloved, to trust and obey, seals us as the children of God and forever members of His family. In Him the enemy of our soul has been defeated, disarmed, and discredited. The prison doors that have held us captive to his ways have been broken open. The earthquake brought about by His crucifixion and resurrection has shaken them wide open through which His people can now run free. Jesus is not an agent of Satan. He is not out of his mind. He is the Savior of the world and makes those who believe in Him children of God forever. Amen.

³₃Rowling, J. K., and Mary GrandPré. *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. New York: A.A. Levine Books, 1998. 295-299.