

**THE REAL JESUS**  
**A Series on the Book of Mark**  
**“Out of Control”**  
**Mark 3:7-35**  
**New City Church of LA**  
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**By Jason Bilbrey**

Back in the 70's, when my uncle Bill had just turned 16, he was so excited. He'd been planning things for months. He was going to get his license, plan a date with the girl he liked and borrow my grandfather's car. All was going according to plan until the night of the date came and he asked my grandpa for the keys to the car. My grandpa replied, "The day you get a haircut is the day you may barrow the car."

Bill had anticipated this response, and he had thought of the perfect rebuttal. He said, "But, dad, Jesus had long hair." To which my Grandpa replied, "Yep, and he walked everywhere he went."

I share this story with to illustrate how wildly popular Jesus has gotten by this point in chapter 3. People are traveling great distances, 50 miles for some, on foot just to hear Jesus speak. Verse 9 says that he even had his disciples prepare a boat for him at the lake, fearing that he might be too crowded even to teach. Verse 20 says that he and his disciples were, at one point, not able to eat.

In addition to his new and bold teaching, Verse 10 makes it clear that people were also coming to him with the hopes of being healed.

In the midst of this popularity, three parties try to assert their control over Jesus, to hamper this new thing that he is doing: 1) Evil Spirits, 2) Religious Elites, and 3) Jesus' own Family.

Our objective today will be to study these three parties, their motives and misunderstandings, and explore how each represent a different aspect of how we, you and I, try to assert control over and hamper the work of Jesus today. And my thesis is this: to be a Christian is to be "out of control." If you think this might be a bit of a double entendre, you would be right.

### **Demons**

Let's begin at verse 11: "Whenever the evil[a] spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, 'You are the Son of God.' But he gave them strict orders not to tell who he was."

What!? Why is Jesus telling the demons to be quiet when they are acknowledging what Jesus is trying to tell everyone about himself? Isn't this the very thing Jesus was trying to make people understand?

"You re the Son of God," say the demons. You would expect Jesus to say, "Exactly. Thank you. You get it. That is worship to my ears. Before I cast you out, would you mind saying that a bit louder so that these Teachers of the Law could hear you?"

As I wrestled with this, I started noticing accounts of similar interactions scattered all throughout the Gospels. Mark 1:23 is a great example: “Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out, ‘What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!’

‘Be quiet!’ said Jesus sternly. ‘Come out of him!’ The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.”

I researched it. Here’s what I found: In Jesus day, there was a belief that if you knew someone’s real original name, you had a kind of power of him or her. It’s like saying, “I know what all these others don’t. I know who you are, where you come from and what you’re trying to do.”

This was an attempt to gain control over Jesus, to disarm him. “What do you want Jesus of Nazareth, or should I say, the Holy One of God.” Similar thing happens at the end of every Scooby Doo episode I’ve ever seen. The gang finally corners the villain and they say, “We’ve caught you, evil green swamp creature, or should we say, Prof. Johnson.” They rip off the mask and there beneath is just this frail old man who’s built a contraption to take over the world. There can be power in knowing who someone really is. So the evil spirits are ripping off the mask. “You’re not just a man. You’re the son of God.”

But this is so incredibly anticlimactic. After all, the thing behind the mask is not supposed to be scarier than the mask itself. So Jesus, the Son of God, says to them, “First of all, shut your mouth. Second of all, get out.”

Jesus has no tolerance for these weak attempts to subvert him and undermine his authority. So he casts out the demons and restores the individuals oppressed by them.

The teachers of the law see these interactions, and they have their own interpretation.

### **Religious Leaders**

So the Demon’s knew who Jesus was: “You’re the Holy One of God.” The religious leader? Look at verse 22: “He’s Satan’s cousin.” All throughout our study of Mark, it has been and will be the religious leaders, the teachers of the Law, who are the slowest to understand who Jesus really is. As a pastor, that should scare the snot out of me.

In their defense, what Jesus was doing must have been incredibly confusing. After all, they were steeped in the Jewish tradition. They had devoted their entire lives to studying the holy texts of the Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament. The most sacred of these texts was universally known to be Deut. 6. 4-9, the Shema. To this day, most practicing Jews pray this passage twice a day and nail it in a small box on their doorframes. And the Shema begins like this: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.” There is one God, and you are not him. God is in heaven; you are on earth. We don’t pretend to be God. God doesn’t pretend to be us.

So when the teachers of the law saw Jesus driving out demons, they needed some way of explaining it. His power was unearthly. But instead of investigating Jesus’

own claims about himself, the religious leaders took a hard and predisposed stance against it. And in order to justify this stance and retain control, they tried to neutralize what he was doing. "Clearly what this man is doing is not of this world. So, since he cannot be God, he must be the devil." It's a lot like many politicians do today. "How can we spin this to suit our own agenda?"

How does Jesus respond to this? Let's look at verse 23: "So Jesus called them and spoke 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 strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he can rob his house."

First of all, Jesus says, it's a ridiculous notion to believe I'm the devil. Why would Satan work against himself? It's like a soccer team scoring goals on its own net. It's like an army killing off each other rather than the enemy. The devil is not stupid. So I'm obviously not the devil. He's actually a really serious enemy, a strong man.

So, second of all, in order to rob something from the strong man, you have to tie up the strong man first. In other words, you have to be stronger than the strong man. So I am obviously stronger. Now if Satan can oppress people because he is more powerful, then I can't be just a man, either.

So I'm not the devil, and I'm not just a man. Follow the logic. And guys, there's something more. Look at verse 28: "I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin."

If you're anything like me, you have alarm bells going off in your head when you read this. This is a serious statement. As such, I want to spend some significant time exploring what Jesus meant. So here's the deal: let's finish our study of the three parties who oppose Jesus, and we'll come back to it.

### **Jesus' Family**

After Jesus' encounter with the evil spirits and the teachers of the law, yet a third group tries to assert power over him and halt his work. This time, it's Jesus' own family. Verse 20: "Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, 'He is out of his mind.'"

So hearing of his popularity, Jesus' family decides that things are getting way out of hand. He is clearly not in his right mind. They went to take control of the situation, saving everyone a lot of embarrassment.

And how does Jesus respond? Verse 31: "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 brothers 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.'"

Jesus responds by not even seeing them. He stands them up. Even worse, he refers to those seated around him, friends he's known for a few weeks now, as his real family. How hurtful this must have felt.

But Jesus is not trying to say that seeing and spending time with his family is unimportant. He is saying that there is something more important: doing God's will. He had a mission, and would not let his mother and sisters interrupt that mission.

I don't think that they quite understood the gravity of who Jesus was and what he was doing. This new thing that God was doing in the person of Jesus was more important than family. Jesus told all of his followers the same thing: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). In this passage as well as in our passage this morning, Jesus is making a point. He is not contradicting the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment: honor your father and mother; nor the general rule of loving one another. What Jesus is saying is that your passion for following Christ should so dwarf your other loves that they look like hate in comparison.

I don't know about you, but I love my family, my wife, father, mother and siblings. They are the dearest people in the world to me. And I know that Christ is not calling me to love them any less, only to love him so much more that it makes my love for them, and myself, seem small in comparison.

So let's review: The evil spirits tried to control Jesus by ripping off his mask and revealing who he really was. The Teachers of the Law tried to control him by undermining his authority. Jesus' family tried to control him by reminding him who he really was: just a carpenter's son from a small village called Nazareth.

None could have imagined what lay in store for Jesus: Before the foundation of the world, God had planned for Jesus to be executed, paying the punishment for humanity's sin so as to reconcile the broken relationship between the Creator and his Creation. Christ would be put to death so as to give life and forgiveness to any who accept it.

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That brings us to the issue of the unforgivable sin.

### **The Unforgivable Sin**

Let's remind ourselves once again of what Jesus says. Verse 28: "I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin."

As always, we have to keep in mind the number one rule in biblical interpretation: context. The context in which Jesus said these two statements will help us know how to interpret them. So, notice whom Jesus is addressing. Verse 22: "And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, 'He is possessed by Beelzebub! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons.'" Jesus is responding to the religious leaders' accusation, but he does not say that they have committed this sin. Maybe they have, maybe not. What Jesus does say is that when encounters God's Spirit, yet resents it, is on very shaky ground, and perhaps has gone over the edge.

This is scary. There are two fears that this passage may rouse in us.

First, perhaps I have committed this. What about that time I was flipping through the channels and came across that TV preacher and thought, "That guy's full of it." Or how about when I cursed out God when my best friend died in high school?

Let's look at who the Spirit is. Jesus says in John's gospel that he will send the Spirit to his disciples after he has ascended into heaven to comfort them in his absence, guide them in all truth, and *convict the world of sin*. When a person accepts Christ, Scripture is clear that the Spirit is opening that person's eyes to see how truly dark and depraved they are. The spirit convicts, helping us to distinguish between good, found in God, and evil, found in the human heart. This leads a person to repentance, to turning away from their former way of living to follow Christ. "The kingdom of God is near," Jesus proclaimed in chapter 1 of Mark. "Repent and believe." Mark also says that John the Baptist also came preaching repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Scripture is clear: repentance leads to forgiveness.

But though the Spirit compels all people to see the emptiness of their lives, scripture is clear that some men and women have hardened themselves against God to such an extent that they ignore the guilt of their darkness.

This is where the unforgivable sin comes in. Men and women can make their hearts so calloused that they go from the defensive to the offensive. They no longer just resist; they attack.

This is what Jesus is saying: There is a point at which you can so disparage the Spirit that he leaves you alone. To quote John Piper, *The Unforgivable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is "An act of resistance which belittles the Holy Spirit so grievously that he withdraws for ever with his convicting power so that we are never able to repent and be forgiven."*

In other words, if are sitting here today with a twinge of fear and guilt for having cursed out God 10 years ago or last night, it is clear that the Spirit is still working in your heart. The spirit is still convicting you and leading you toward repentance. My guess is that blasphemers against the Holy Spirit don't go to church. They have, in effect, told God they want nothing to do with him, and he honors their request.

This brings us to our second fear: that God is unjust. By withdrawing the Spirit, he consigns these people to hell. That's not fair.

The other day I was listening to my favorite radio show on NPR, called *This American Life*. They were playing tapes from something called the Apology Line. In the 1980s, The Apology Line was a number you could call to confess to anything you wanted and be recorded. People call and listen to other people's confessions and even respond. This was all before the Internet, of course. So as I was listening to some of these confessions they were playing, I heard one that blew me away. I thought that I'd share it with you this morning.

There is a point at which, when our deepest, darkest secrets are sitting right in front of us, raw and uncensored, that we all should say the same thing. "I am so despicable. I hope that I burn in hell for this, because it wasn't not right."

Scripture affirms this sentiment over and over again. We are more wretched than we will ever be willing to admit. All have fallen short of the glory of God. There is no one who is better than anyone else. We are all Hitler's in our own right. There are no good guys and bad guys. We are all bad guys. And there is always punishment for bad guys. All men and women are utterly depraved and deserving of the punishment for their crimes. This is justice. This is fair and right.

Now let's talk about injustice and unfairness. It is not just or fair that Christ should step into this sequence and pay this penalty for us. God's love is not fair. His grace is not warranted. By taking our guilt upon himself, Christ bestows innocence upon us.

It's like if I left home after preaching to go get some Starbucks but realize I'm short a dollar. So I decide to rob an old man walking along, beating him up and leaving him for dead. And while I'm in line to get my coffee, the police come to take me away. So next week I'm sitting in court and hear the verdict: I sentenced to a lifetime in prison for such a heinous crime. But just as they are taking me away, the old man who I'd beaten nearly to death is wheeled into the courtroom. Everyone stops and looks at him. He's in a wheelchair and is hooked up to an oxygen mask. He can no longer speak but slowly and painfully starts writing on a piece of paper: "I forgive this man and I, myself, accept the punishment for this his crime. Put me in prison in his place."

This is not how justice works. Justice says that each person should receive the punishment for his crime. God doesn't undermine justice—after all, his very nature is perfectly just—but God satisfies the requirements of the Law in the person of Jesus, yet Christ receives the punishment for our sins. This is totally undeserved.

As soon as we start saying that God should forgive all of our sins, all of our blasphemies, we are in danger of calling our sins forgivable. We say they are not that bad, not really deserving of hell. In coming to Christ, we are thrusting ourselves at his feet, completely subject to his mercy, knowing that if he did not give it to us, it would be perfectly just.

But brothers and sisters, when we approach God in this attitude, it is not a guessing game. He has promised to show us Grace through Christ. But we must never mistake promise for entitlement. This is the gospel message pure and simple. We are entitled to nothing. Yet we are given everything.

We are more sinful than we could possibly imagine, yet we are more loved than we could possibly imagine.

### **Conclusion**

So if this is the Gospel, what does it mean to be a Christian. As I suggested at the beginning of our study, to be a Christian is to be out of control. If you are truly so bad and God is truly so perfect, you are absolutely helpless.

Here's the bad news: you can't control the trajectory of your life. Here's the good news: God offers to take control, redeeming your life through Christ. Here's the bad news: He never gives it back. He never relinquishes control. (hint: this is also good news.)

This third fact describes the entirety of Christian life. To be a Christian is to be out of control. Let me illustrate this with our three groups, the Evil Spirits, the Religious Leaders, and Jesus' Family.

### 1. Evil Spirits

Do demons believe in the existence of God? Yes. Do they believe that Jesus was God's Son? Yes. Demons today know that Jesus died for humanity's sin? Yes. Are they Christians? No. Why? Because Christianity is not merely giving intellectual assent to a list of doctrines. It is more than knowing and believing the truth.

And, by the way, I'm not just talking about avoiding evil actions. In case you just walked in and didn't hear the part about us all being Hitler in our hearts, we cannot, by our own efforts avoid evil, or even know what evil is. So much of the time, Christianity gets boiled down to this: don't watch porn; don't get drunk; don't yell at your mom; don't smoke or chew or go with girls who do. Guess what? Trees don't do those things. Does that make them Christians?

So what is Christianity? Christianity is allowing God's undeserved generosity toward you transform your life. As I walk out of that courthouse having just been forgiven by the very man I beat, imagine what I must feel. I can't comprehend this grace and love. All at once, I feel more free than I could ever feel, and more enslaved than I could ever feel.

Here's what I mean by enslaved: what kind of a person would I be if I went back to my former life? I can never be the same. God's grace toward me beckons me to dive deeper and deeper. Consider the gospel as an invitation to give God, not just your guilt and punishment, but everything.

### 2. Religious Leaders

What do the teachers of the Law show us about Christianity? Remember, Jesus rocked their worldview with his claim of divinity, but they were totally unwilling to explore that possibility. Instead, they hardened themselves against him.

But Jesus does this to everyone's world. Following Christ means having your world turned upside-down. *Following Christ means being willing to say, "This changes everything."* We are not in control. Christianity is a continual transformation, and we must be humble in acknowledging that God knows better than we do. We relinquish any delusions of control.

### 3. Jesus' Family

Lastly, when Jesus' mother and sisters were at the door, who did Jesus say his real family was? Those who do the will of God. This does not mean jumping through moral hoops. Again, if you've been in the bathroom this whole time and are just now joining us, we really don't like this idea here at New City. In order to understand what Jesus means by the "will of God," we have to remember that Christianity operates within the realm of a relationship.

Let's take my relationship with my wife, Courtney, for example. If I say that I love my wife, yet do things that I know she hates, you wouldn't believe me. No, to enter a reciprocal, intimate relationship with someone means making their delights your own.

What Jesus is saying is this: Being a part of God's family means discovering and adopting his passions. We do what makes him happy not because we have to, but because we want to, because we want to be like him. This means forsaking our own desires in favor of his. It means relinquishing control. It means sacrifice.

Here's why the bad news is really the good news. In giving up what we want in life, we entrust ourselves to and become enraptured by a foundation more stable than any family, a truth more authentic than any philosophy, a beauty fairer than any mountain vista, and authority greater than that of any CEO, a delight more desirous than any partner, a purpose more noble than any cause. Everything that we pursue in life will one day turn to dust. But God's glory is forever.

Let's pray.