

“LIAR LUNATIC OR LORD”

Mark 3.20–35

20 Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. 21 When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, ‘He is out of his mind.’ 22 And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, ‘He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons.’ 23 So Jesus called them over to him and began to speak 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; his end has come. 27 In fact, no one can enter a strong man’s house without first tying him up. Then he can plunder the strong man’s house. 28 Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter, 29 but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin.’ 30 He said this because they were saying, ‘He has an impure spirit.’ 31 Then Jesus’ mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. 32 A crowd was sitting round him, and they told him, ‘Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.’ 33 ‘Who are my mother and my brothers?’ he asked. 34 Then he looked at those seated in a circle round him and said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers! 35 Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.’

Some years ago, CS Lewis in his book *Mere Christianity* proposed a trichotomy regarding the nature of Jesus. Jesus was either:

- a liar,
- a Lunatic
- or Lord.

Liar, because Jesus makes certain claims about himself which, if not true, make him a fraud.

Lunatic, because Jesus said he was divine.

Lord, because Jesus is so remarkable he must be divine.

Although Lewis was writing in the 20th Century, his idea is not new.

Liar, *Lunatic* and *Lord* all feature in today’s reading.

Let's start with Lunatic.

Have you ever realised that Jesus' family, including his mother thought he was mad? We have it here in 3.21. It reads:

21 When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, 'He is out of his mind.' (Mk 2.21, NRSV)

Jesus breaking out from the domestic life of carpentry, is “out and about” casting out demons, healing the sick, and proclaiming a radical message about the kingdom of God. It's more than his family can take, and so they wonder about his sanity.

In a web article entitled *Was Jesus a Lunatic?* by Josh McDowell, I found this helpful little quote by philosopher Peter Kreef:

“A measure of your insanity is the size of the gap between what you think you are and what you really are. If I think I am the greatest philosopher in America, I am only an arrogant fool; if I think I am Napoleon, I am probably over the edge; if I think I am a butterfly, I am fully embarked from the sunny shores of sanity. But if I think I am God, I am even more insane because the gap between anything finite and the infinite God is even greater than the gap between any two finite things, even a man and a butterfly. Well, then, why not Liar or Lunatic? But almost no one who has read the Gospels can honestly and seriously consider that option. The savviness, the canniness, the human wisdom, the attractiveness of Jesus emerge from the Gospels with an unavoidable force to any but the most hardened and prejudiced reader.”

(Quoted in: <https://www.josh.org/jesus-Liar-Lunatic-lord/>)

I wonder if you've ever had a family member who is “out of their mind?” Maybe you've been out of your mind?

It's a scary thing. There's loss of control; there's fear of stigma; and there's a sense of helplessness. Jesus' family is worried about all of these things. They are flabbergasted. You can hear them saying:

“Just what are we to do with our crazy brother and son? How can he say he is God?!”

Liar

Jesus had been casting out demons in the name of the Lord, but the teachers of the Law saw it otherwise. They say:

'He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons'

(Mk 3.22 NRSV).

To them, Jesus' good work was a lie.

To them, evil was pretending to be good.

If this was true, then Jesus would indeed be a fraud or a Liar. Nevertheless, his retort tells us otherwise:

'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; his end has come.

(Mk 3.23-26, NRSV)

The trouble with lying is that it is exhausting! You have to remember everything you've said that isn't true to cover your tracks. The way of truth is much less demanding!

Have you ever had to deal with a compulsive Liar? It's soul destroying. You lose all faith, trust and affinity in that person.

If Jesus was a Liar he would be very hard to follow. Faith, trust and affinity, are they not the very things that attract us to Jesus? Being a Liar is not one of them.

Peter Kreef says it like this:

"Jesus has in abundance precisely those three qualities which Liars and Lunatics most conspicuously lack: (1) His practical wisdom, His ability to read human hearts (2) His deep and winning love, His passionate compassion, His ability to attract people and make them feel at home and forgiven, His authority; and above all (3) His ability to astonish, His unpredictability, His creativity. Liars and Lunatics are all so dull and predictable! No one who knows the Gospels and human beings can seriously entertain the possibility that Jesus was a Liar or a Lunatic, a bad man."

Cited in: <https://www.josh.org/jesus-Liar-Lunatic-lord/>

Lord.

At the end of the reading, Jesus clearly aligns himself with God. He says:

*34 Then he looked at those seated in a circle round him and said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! 35 Whoever does **God's will** is my brother and sister and mother.'*
(Mk 3.34-35, NRSV, bold added)

On other occasions he will gladly receive the title *Lord*.

In the modern world, the term *Lord* is trickier than in ancient times. In Jesus' time atheism rarely existed. Belief in a lord god was not a problem – but exactly what God, or the gods were like was a problem! In our modern era, (at least in the West), atheism (belief in no god) is common. So to say "*Jesus is Lord*" has the added complication of persuading one that God exists. Nevertheless, the God we believe in is the one shown to us by Jesus. Perhaps that is our starting point, when people say they don't believe in God, let's begin with belief in Jesus.

So what are we to make of CS Lewis' trichotomy?

I guess it's about identity. Is Jesus Liar, Lunatic or Lord? This question is not new. In fact, that's why the Gospel was written.

As the early church told the story of Jesus, they found themselves confronted by people wondering this very thing. As the Gospel story is told, the sceptics are thinking:

"Well Jesus was just a conjurer- a fraud and liar- why should we follow him".

Or:

Jesus was obviously a lunatic, why would we follow such an idiot?

Or maybe when the sceptic's heart is softened:

"Jesus is Lord".

Mark has been quite deliberate about this. He address the sceptics "head on". The text works like this:

"Are you thinking Jesus was mad?"

Well Jesus himself said: 'How can Satan drive out Satan.'" (Mk 3.23, NRSV)

“Are you thinking Jesus was a fraud?”

Well Jesus himself says: “Truly I tell you” (Mk 3.28, NRSV)

“Are you wondering if Jesus is Lord?”

Well Jesus himself says: “Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.” (Mk3.35, NRSV)

These ready-made answers are also for us. When we meet modern world sceptics, Mk’s answers are there for us. Of course, we have to nuance them for our own context, but the concepts are there:

- Jesus is on the side of truth
- Jesus overcomes evil. It does not have the last say.
- Where is God? In the midst of all the Brothers and Sisters doing God’s good will for the sake of others.

Liar, Lunatic or Lord?

You choose!

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.