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Text: Mark 3:7-35

Title: Appearances can be deceptive!

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File: Mark 3

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A few years ago on the Spanish island of Tenerife, the local police got a panicked call telling them that a gorilla had escaped from the local zoo. Now you can imagine the chaos that caused. A 200 kilo gorilla on the loose. The police called up a veterinarian and requested he tranquilize the escaped animal but this vet had only been a vet for 2 months and just a matter of minutes later he was facing this massive silverback.

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Well he shot the sedative at the animal & managed to bring him down. He approached the downed animal, carefully, gingerly, only to find out, it wasn’t a gorilla after all but a zoo worker in a gorilla suit who had been checking that the protocols for escaped animals were working properly. You see appearances can sometimes be deceiptive. As the poor vet found out the hard way. Just because something looks like a gorilla doesn’t make it the real thing.

Slide 3

And in Mark chapter 3 we are going find out something similar. Just because someone looks like a follower of Jesus doesn’t make them the real thing. For in quick succession we are going to meet five groups that all in one way or another look like the children of God. In some ways they all look like or act like or speak like they are serving God but appearances can be deceptive. Not everyone who looks like a Christian is a Christian. Let’s see why.

Slide 4

1. **Crowds (verses 7-10)**

*“Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the lake & a large crowd from Galilee followed.* ***8****When they heard about all he was doing, many people came to him from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea & the regions across the Jordan and around Tyre and Sidon.****9****Because of the crowd he told his disciples to have a small boat ready for him, to keep the people from crowding him.****10****For he had healed many, so that those with diseases were pushing forward to touch him”.*

Last week we saw there had been growing conflict between Jesus and the religious establishment. The last verse we looked at said that they were even hatching a plot to kill Jesus. So Jesus withdrew. It wasn’t his time. His mission was yet to be established. So he gets away from it all. But the people follow him so that large crowds now surround him.

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They come from Galilee to the west. Judea, Jerusalem & Idumea in the south. Transjordan is in the east. Tyre and Sidon are in the north. So you get what Mark is telling us. North, south, east, and west, people flocked to be with Jesus and they crowded in on him so much, they wanted to touch him so much, they wanted healing from him so much that Jesus gets into a boat so he can have some space. So he can teach them without their constant interruption.

Isn’t it good that crowds of people want to follow Jesus? Isn’t it a sign of success that Jesus has become so popular, so trendy? Well no. Because you get the sense the crowds don’t want his teaching but his healing. In v20 when he retreats again to his house, they surround him so much, so constantly, he can’t even eat. This is not a mark of a follower of God but of selfishness, they are not healthy followers but people obsessed with getting what they want

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Appearances can be deceptive. The presence of crowds doesn’t prove there is a genuine move of God. Just because everyone is following some sort of religious fad, we have to be wise. We must use this sort of music in worship, we need to copy what is working overseas, we ought to change our name, update our profile, use social media, follow the latest bandwagon. No, appearances can be deceptive. Just because the crowds are doing it doesn’t make it right. We need to keep going back to Scripture & follow it not the crowds.

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And let us remember that the crowds in our society are now not with us but against us. We are on the wrong side of history they keep telling us. You have to be wrong because everyone else believes something different about marriage, about creation, about science, about the Bible. But appearances can be deceptive. Following Jesus is far more important than keeping up with the Jones or keeping up with the Kardashians.

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But as an aside please note that when Jesus is crowded in on each side, he withdraws. Firstly to the lake, then to his home and in v13 up onto a mountain. He gets away for time with God and himself. Elsewhere it says he removes himself to pray. In the midst of pressures and the pushing and shoving of the people around we need to hear God’s voice, we need to draw near to his help. Actually pure and simply, we need God Himself. We need Him.

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His strength when we are weak. His purity when we are make poor choices. His ability, his presence, his riches. God Himself. As preacher Vance Havner once said “*If we do not follow Christ’s example to come apart we may indeed just come apart*”! But it’s not just the crowds

Slide 10

1. **It’s the confessors (verse 11-12)**

***11 “****Whenever the impure spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, “You are the Son of God.”****12****But he gave them strict orders not to tell others about him”.*

There we go again. Jesus is now surrounded by voices crying out the truth “You are the Son of God.” Wow. Finally someone gets it. Jesus is not just a healer. A magician of the body. Not just a teacher. Not just a good man. He is actually God’s Son.

Now that’s a sign of a true follower isn’t it? Someone who knows their theology. Someone who has looked into who Jesus is and discovered the truth. Slide 11

But appearances are deceptive because it is the impure spirits, it’s the demons that are declaring the truth. And when you think about it, demons are unsuitable witnesses. You can’t trust their testimony. So these words are from the wrong lips and at the wrong time.

For Jesus is currently trying to hose down the crowds expectations. He is withdrawing so as not to provoke the religious leaders. And this sort of testimony will do just that. It will stir up trouble. Actually we will see in the rest of the chapter it does stir up trouble. By unmasking his true identity, the demons are creating even more chaos around Jesus.

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Just because someone knows their doctrine. Just because someone has made a credible

profession of faith. Just because someone has memorised scripture or prays beautiful

sounding prayers doesn’t make them a follower of Jesus. Appearances can be deceptive.

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That reminds me of a quote I once read from Giuseppe Garibaldi. Garbaldi was an Italian patriot, soldier, and hero-figure. He devoted his life to the cause of uniting Italy. In May 1860, Garibaldi had landed in Sicily with a volunteer force of 1000 red shirts. Within two weeks this force had taken the city of Palermo, forcing the defeat of an army of 20,000 regulars. Now Garibaldi had an incredibly committed volunteer army & he would appeal for recruits in these terms: “*I offer neither pay, nor quarters, nor provisions; I offer hunger, thirst, forced marches, battles and death. Let him who loves his country with his heart and* ***not with his lips only****, follow me*!”

That’s what Jesus will end up saying to those who will be on his team. “*Let him who loves His God with his heart* ***and not just his lips only****, follow me*”. It is not just about the crowds, it is not just about a confession, actually it is not just about being on the inner circle. Look at

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1. **The Disciples (verses 13-19)**

***13 “****Jesus went up on a mountainside & called to him those he wanted & they came to him.* ***14****He appointed twelve that they might be with him & that he might send them out to preach* ***15 &*** *to have authority to drive out demons.  Slide 15*

***16****These are the twelve he appointed: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter),****17****James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means “sons of thunder”)****18****Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot****19*** *& Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him”.*

If Jesus isn’t after the crowds then what is he after? Well he is not about programmes but people. To fulfil his ultimate mission he draws together a small amount of people. He could have called 120 people. He could have chosen 5000 people but he selected 12, just 12. Symbolically the people of Israel started with just 12 brothers that became 12 tribes and through them grew into a great multitude. Here God is starting again with 12 apostles who he will disciple for three years and then let them loose on the whole world.

12 ordinary, everyday men. A few fisherman, a tax collector, a zealot, a couple of hot heads, not really your obvious choices. And at the end of this list of disciples, actually at the end of every list in all of the gospels is Judas Iscariot, who betrays him. Who betrays Jesus.

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Appearances can be deceptive. Not even the leadership of the Church is safe from deception. And I find it fascinating that at the end of three years of ministry, when at the last Supper Jesus tells his disciples one of you is going to betray me, that no one knows who he is talking about! It isn’t obvious that Judas is a betrayer! He doesn’t look any different to any of the other disciples. Outwardly he isn’t wearing black and everyone else white. He doesn’t have a scour on his face whenever else has a smile. He looks like the rest of them. He speaks like the rest of them. But he is not a true disciple.

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For appearances can be deceptive. In the church there are wolves in sheep’s clothing. There are authors who will lead you astray. Pastors who are hypocrites, song leaders who are putting on a show, parents that are going through the motions, kids that are just doing what their parents won’t them to do, others who will blend into the Christian crowd.

Not everyone who looks like a Christian is a Christian. And Jesus knew that when he looked at the crowds, he understands that as he hears the demons talk, he grasps this even when he chooses his closest disciples. And he is aware of this when he confronts

Slide 18

1. **The teachers of the Law**

***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.”*

For now the religious establishment decide to throw in the big guns. They get the experts in the field to come and run their finger over the words and actions of Jesus. These guys who know God’s law, God’s scriptures more anyone else, they will help lead us all to the correct conclusion. Well won’t they?

And these teachers note that something supernatural is happening. They agree that Jesus has vast, vast power. They come to the conclusion he is in fact driving out demons. But where is he getting this power from, they ponder? And the conclusion they reach is that Satan is the power behind the throne. Jesus isn’t working for God, how could someone who blasphemes and doesn’t fast and who works on the Sabbath, how could they be from God? He must be from Satan. And he must be casting out demons with the devils help.

Now this is certainly an option. For all believers should recognise that Satan has power. He has power to tempt that’s for sure. He has power to get under our skin and fill us with dark thoughts. And at times God allows him to wreak havoc in our world. So it is certainly a possibility that Jesus is from Satan.

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***23****So Jesus called them over to him & 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.*

*Slide 20*

After King Solomon’s rule Jeroboam & Rehoboam fought a civil war that fractured the kingdom of Israel. The north & the south of America fought for years a bloody civil war that caused the whole country distress. In the recent times we have seen Labour fight against itself, then the Liberals, now the nationals. We all know marriages, sporting teams, Churches when they attack each other, cause division, & division often leads to destruction.

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Jesus says Satan isn’t that dumb. For “*no one can enter a strong man’s house without first tying him up. Then he can plunder the strong man’s house”.*The truth is someone stronger than Satan is attacking Satan. And yes Satan is fighting back but he is fighting an unwinnable war. Jesus has come to attack the strong man. He will over time tie him up and he will rescue his captives and bring them back into God’s kingdom.

Slide 22

But you see the problem? It is the ones who are religious, the one who are leaders of the religious institutions, the teachers of the Bible who are not really followers of God. Appearances can be deceptive. In fact they are in danger of committing the unforgivable sin.

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***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.”*

Listen to this carefully, “*people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter*.” Isn’t that the wonder of Jesus gospel? That there is forgiveness for small sins and big sins, for word sins and action sins. The good news of Jesus is that it doesn’t matter what we have done it can be forgiven. It doesn’t matter how bad we’ve been we can be forgiven. It doesn’t matter what mess you’ve made in your life, there is a way forward where that mess can be cleaned up. There's forgiveness in the blood of Jesus if you come and embrace Him by faith alone. Isn't that the gospel? Isn't that the good news of the gospel?

Slide 24

And yet even though this is the gospel truth there is still an unforgivable sin. An eternally unforgivable sin. So it is incredible important that the teachers of the law, that the crowds, that we, never commit that sin. So what is it?

Well the teachers of the law think that Jesus has already committed it. It is blaspheme, claiming to be God. And they know that the law also said that if you break the Sabbath you should be stoned. And as well if you don’t fast you really can’t be a true follower of God. So in chapter 2 they want to kill Jesus because he is a blasphemer, a glutton and a Sabbath breaker. Those things put together are unforgivable. Jesus then is beyond redemption.

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But it can’t be blaspheme, Paul will later say in the book of 1 Timothy that he was a blasphemer and he was forgiven. And it is not Sabbath breaking or adultery, or paedophilia, or murder or satanic worship or suicide. Jesus says it is blaspheming against the Holy Spirit.

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Blaspheme against the Holy Spirit is continuing down the path that the Pharisees are currently traveling down. It is a defiant hostility toward God that is so great that they even attribute what God is doing through the Holy Spirit to Satan. This person is committing the unforgivable sin because they are placing themselves in the situation where they will never repent and will never trust in Jesus. They will never open themselves up to the forgiveness offered to them by God’s Holy Spirit. And it is not a one time incident. It is an ongoing action that keeps the person away from God. That continually rejects God’s saving grace.

So if you are wondering if you have committed the unforgivable sin you probably haven’t. Because if you think you have done it and want to be forgiven, then that sin can be forgiven. But if you don’t care or you are so committed, so fixed, so blind to what is going on then you are not even going to consider the fact you might have committed such a sin.

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You see appearance can be deceptive. You can look like you are zealous for God. You can be firm in your religious convictions. You can even be a teacher of others in the area of religion and faith. And you can still be lost, eternally lost. In fact you might even be a part of Jesus

Slide 28

1. **Family (verses 20-1, 31-5)**

And deceive others. ***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.”*

Now I think Jesus family love him so much they are truly worried about him. He isn’t eating properly, now most mothers are worried about their kids not eating properly, aren’t they? He is socializing with tax collectors, prostitutes and sinners. Won’t that give the family a bad name? They are hearing reports that he is breaking the Sabbath and encouraging others to do the same, he is wandering around Palestine like a vagrant, he is even calling himself the Son of Man. Worse of all, he’s out there debating and arguing with the leadership of the land. Not only is he going to get humiliated, he’s going to get himself killed!

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Now you would think that his family would be on his team. You would think Mary would be on his side. She, after all, has been spoken to by angels. She knows that his name means God Saves. She has seen firsthand that he has been perfect since birth. But no, despite their family ties, they are on the wrong side. They may love him, they may have their concerns for him, they may want to protect him from himself, but they too have got it wrong. In fact they are not really his closest family at all. “*No all those who do God’s will are my real brothers and sisters and mothers*” says Jesus.

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Appearance can be deceptive. Just because you are part of the family doesn’t make you a Christian. Just like going to McDonalds doesn’t make you a Big Mac. You might have Christian parents, you might have been raised in the Church. You might even be a good Presbyterian. But it’s not about your family.

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Actually as an aside Jesus had a pretty tough family. Brothers who didn’t believe. A father who wasn’t there so probably he passed away somewhere along the way. A mother who has somehow lost her faith. It’s a pretty messy family. Probably a bit like yours and mine. You see Jesus understands the stresses & strains of the family. He understands opposition. He understands when the world crowds in on us. Because he’s been there, done that. Appearances can be deceptive, it’s not about your family, it’s not about whether you teach, it’s not about whether you are a leader or your confession or even if you follow the crowds.

It’s about Jesus. Has he called you to himself? Have you come to him? And are you committed to him? Are you doing God’s will? Now it’s not as if our obedience proves to God that you believe. But it is the evidence that our faith is real. And that is what Jesus is calling us to have. A real faith. Not a pretend faith. Not a plastic faith. Not a crowd pleasing faith. A faith where we follow Jesus. Allow him to forgive us all our sins. And where he sticks close to us no matter what life throws at us.

Slide 32

Let me end with a story. Hitler imprisoned a German pastor, Martin Niemoeller, for eight years. He realized that if Niemoeller, a WW1 hero, could be persuaded to join his cause then much opposition would collapse, so after many years in prison, Hitler sent a former friend of Niemoeller to visit him, a friend who now supported the Nazis. Seeing Niemoeller in his cell, the one time friend is reported as saying, "Martin, Martin! Why are you here?" To which he received from Niemoeller the response, "My friend! Why are you not here?"

Why are you here today? To be on Jesus side? To follow God’s will? To grow in your faith so that he might send you out to be his representative? And is there anyone we know that we can ask of them, “My friend, why are you not here?” Here with us? Here with Jesus.

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***31****Then Jesus’ mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him.****32****A crowd was sitting around 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 around him and said, “Here are my mother and my brothers!****35****Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.”*