

John 10:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And many of them said, He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him?

Analysis

And many of them said, He hath a devil, and is mad—The accusation of demon possession (δαίμονιον ἔχει/daimonion echei) was not new; Jesus's enemies made this charge repeatedly (John 7:20, 8:48-52). The additional claim "is mad" (μαίνεταί/mainetai) suggests insanity, loss of reason. This was a convenient way to dismiss Jesus without engaging His arguments: don't debate Him, declare Him deranged.

The irony is profound: they accuse the Logos (Word, Reason incarnate) of madness. The one who spoke creation into existence, who embodies divine wisdom, is called a lunatic. This reveals the blindness of unbelief—unable to recognize truth when confronted with it, unbelief resorts to slander and dismissal.

Why hear ye him?—The question reveals their strategy: marginalize Jesus by destroying His credibility. If He's demon-possessed and insane, His words need not be considered. This is an ad hominem attack—discredit the messenger to avoid the message. It's the tactic of those who cannot refute the argument, so they attack the arguer.

This response parallels how every age treats claims that threaten its comfortable assumptions. Rather than wrestling with uncomfortable truth, dismiss it as extremism, fanaticism, or madness. The Pharisees couldn't defeat Jesus's logic or deny His miracles, so they attacked His sanity and spiritual legitimacy.

Historical Context

In the ancient world, demon possession explained abnormal behavior, especially religious claims that challenged orthodoxy. By calling Jesus demon-possessed, the Jewish leaders placed Him outside legitimate religious discourse. Madness (mania) was associated with ecstatic pagan cults and false prophets. The accusation served to isolate Jesus from serious consideration.

Jesus had just claimed power over His own death and resurrection, unity with the Father, and authority to judge. To first-century Jewish ears, this either vindicated Him as Messiah or condemned Him as a blasphemous madman. The accusers chose the latter, unwilling to accept the implications of the former.

Church history records similar accusations against faithful Christians: Paul was called mad (Acts 26:24), early Christians were labeled atheists (for rejecting pagan gods) and cannibals (misunderstanding communion), Reformers were denounced as heretics, and revivalists dismissed as fanatics. Truth-tellers are often marginalized by those whose systems they threaten.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. How do modern skeptics use similar dismissive tactics ("Christians are anti-science," "faith is irrational") to avoid engaging Christianity's truth claims?
2. Why is it easier to attack a messenger's credibility than to refute their message?
3. What does this verse teach about expecting opposition when faithfully representing Christ?

Interlinear Text

ἔλεγον δὲ πολλοὶ ἐξ αὐτοῦ Δαιμόνιον ἔχει καὶ
said **And** **many** **of** **him** **a devil** **He hath** **and**
G3004 G1161 G4183 G1537 G846 G1140 G2192 G2532

μαίνεται· τί αὐτοῦ ἀκούετε
is mad **why** **him** **hear ye**
G3105 G5101 G846 G191

Additional Cross-References

Mark 3:21 (Parallel theme): And when his friends heard of it, they went out to lay hold on him: for they said, He is beside himself.

John 7:20 (Evil): The people answered and said, Thou hast a devil: who goeth about to kill thee?

John 8:52 (Evil): Then said the Jews unto him, Now we know that thou hast a devil. Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and thou sayest, If a man keep my saying, he shall never taste of death.