

3 responses to Jesus

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Date: 05 October 2014

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[0 : 00] Well, I think this evening I have just three points, three different responses to Jesus.

! It will take me a while to say them, but I think there's only three things. Three responses! Two of them to avoid and one of them to copy. So let's look at the text. You've got Mark three open in front of you and I'll say that it is in the form of a sandwich. We've got bread, something bread, and the bread on the outside is the family. So in chapter three verses 20 to 21, it's the family. They're coming to take Jesus because he's out of his mind, they think. And then we have to hold that thought. And in the middle of the sandwich is a bit about the teachers of the law from Jerusalem. So there's quite a section about that. And then we return to the subject of the family in verses 31 to 34. So presumably we're meant to have that as one complete sandwich. Think of it all together. There's a lot of, just in terms of the text, there's a lot of standing. I don't notice. Did you notice the repetition of standing? So when Jesus talks about the kingdom, did you notice? It's always worth noticing repetitions. Verse 24, if a kingdom is divided, that kingdom cannot stand. Verse 24, the house is divided against itself, the house cannot stand. That's verse 25. Verse 26, if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand. So there's a bit of standing there. There's some other standing as well. There's verse 31, Jesus' mother and brothers arrived standing outside.

They sent someone in to call him. So they're doing some standing. And the verse 21, he is out of his mind. Does anybody have an authorised version? Authorised version says he's beside himself. Because it literally is to stand outside yourself. It's a verb of those two bits put together. And there's a standing up in there as well somewhere. I presume Mark was conscious of that when he wrote it. He actually said standing quite a bit. But what we're looking out for here is the reactions and responses and interpretations to Jesus, of Jesus, of who he is. That's really what we're looking at. And it's like the question that Jesus is going to ask later in chapter 8, verse 27, where he says, who do people say that I am? You know, what do people make of me? Who do they think I am? And then he makes it more personal in the next sentence and says, well, what about you? Who do you say that I am? And I'm probably too polite to make it as personal as that this evening. But that is lurking under the surface.

What's your reaction to Jesus? Would you fit into any of these three categories? And we'll come back to that slide with the conclusion, but partly because I ran out of paper. So let's follow the text through. So let's look at the first part of the sandwich. We have as follows.

We have the house. So I've tried to get that idea of the crowdedness. Little tiny streets, people sitting on the roof, people crowding around, people looking in through the window, people getting their heads around the door. It's the familiar scene, isn't it? We've come to see this before. You remember last time people pushing and shoving, falling over themselves just to touch Jesus. Same sort of thing. I think the Lord probably found it rather testing, you know, that people were pushing probably quite rudely.

[4 : 20] And on this occasion, his disciples were not even able to eat. And I wonder what sort of crush makes it impossible to eat. So that, you know, you're, well, there wouldn't have been bacon and eggs, would there? But they're cooking something. And you can't actually get as far as eating it because somebody's pushed in and said, Lord, can you tell them this one about, you know, I've got a question here. What does it mean in Zechariah? Or something like that. But it's just so intense that they haven't even got the leisure to eat. So that's quite a busy situation. And when his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him. They went to lay hold of Jesus, take charge, sort of almost physically, and tell him what he should be doing in no uncertain terms. And they said, he's beside himself. That's literally what he is. Standing outside himself, we'd say he is beside himself.

And that's the first part of the sandwich. And we'll hold that in mind and come back to that. But I don't know what you think of the family. I think we might have quite a bit of sympathy with them,

actually. Come on, Jesus, this is very unrealistic. You know, you can't go without eating. Tell them to go away. Even we can see that what you're doing is ridiculous.

I think perhaps we have some sympathy with them. But let's come back to that. See if I can put that piece of paper where I can find it again. Let's see the next part of the sandwich, which is the teachers of the law. Do you notice where they come from? From Jerusalem. And how, which direction did they travel in to get from Jerusalem? What does it say in the text? Down. Yeah, it was, okay, north, but down.

They came from the important place to here. They came down. In the same way that people come down from Oxford. Because Oxford is the most important place in the world. And if you leave Oxford, you always go down to somewhere else. This is what I think people from Oxford probably would say that.

So they come down from Jerusalem. And it's worth thinking about what sort of people they are. So previously, perhaps Jesus has been dealing with the teachers of the law who are a bit rustic and not terribly well-educated. You know, they haven't got PhDs and dip THs. They're just the local Methodist preacher sort of thing. But here we've got the big guns. These are teachers of the law from Jerusalem. They're the experts. You know, they probably have got an education.

[7 : 35] And, well, here they come. So let's look at this part of the sandwich. Now they come straight in with all guns blazing. And they say, he is possessed by Beelzebub. Beelzebub is the name of the God that used to be...

I always get Elijah and Elisha mixed up. Is it because there's no God in Israel that you've gone to consult Beelzebub, the God of Ekron? That was a sort of false God. And by extension, they've said this is the name of Satan. There's a play on words which makes it say, Lord of the flies, which is a dismissive, insulting, belittling way of saying it. But anyway, they're saying he... I haven't even spelt it properly myself. He expels demons by Beelzebub, by the prince of demons. He is driving out demons.

There's Jesus who had perhaps, even then, expelled a demon from somebody. And we know typically what happens, that there's a big explosion of power, perhaps a shriek, and then the chap or lady or child who had been so oppressed and ruined and dehumanized is free and clean and in their right mind and human again. That's the sort of thing that happened. And these people are saying, we're educated. We've come down from Jerusalem to tell you this. He's doing this by the prince of demons. That's how he does it. That's what's going on. And Jesus calls them over, as you saw. And it's interesting to look at his answer to them. So Jesus called them and spoke to them in parables.

You might not have noticed it was a parable, but these are parables, likenesses. It's not a direct answer. It's a sort of figurative answer. And he says, well, let's investigate what you're saying and how this can be. So how can Satan drive out Satan? Let's tease that thought out for a bit. How can he do that? What you would be saying is a picture of internal division within the kingdom of Satan. It's internally divided. Now, Jesus, you see, reinterprets or re-expresses. They said, Beelzebub, but Jesus says, well, you're actually talking about Satan, aren't you? And they were talking about demons, but Jesus said, well, those are Satan as well. So let's boil it down. How can Satan cast out Satan? And he gives it to them in three pictures. He says, what you would be talking about then is a kingdom. If a kingdom is split down the middle and at war with itself, then that kingdom cannot stand. So it's doomed. And he says, likewise, let's just say the same thing again in different words. If a house, I think not meaning an architectural house, but meaning a household, a family business. If a house is divided against itself, split down the middle, divided against itself, then that house cannot stand. And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand. His end has come.

[11 : 43] So he puts it three ways. The last of the third ways is slightly different because it ends up with the punchline. His comeuppance, his doom, his end is there. So that's interpretation number one. It's an internal affair. Satan versus Satan, internal division. And this is a picture of something which is self-destructive.

This is a picture of a kingdom which is fragile, which is certainly irrational because it doesn't make sense to have friendly fire incidents, although I suppose churches are quite good at it sometimes themselves. But it's irrational and it's doomed. And it's doomed internally. So you don't have to add anything to that. Satan's kingdom will just smash itself to pieces. Now, I don't think this is entirely unthinkable. If you turn to Revelation chapter 17, you'll see there is an aspect of this in the visionary picture of Satan's different associates and helpers in his kingdom. In Revelation 17 verse 16, and

I'm not going to go into all the details about who these different people are, but let's say they are different parts of Satan's kingdom. In Revelation 17 verse 16, the beast is one part of Satan's kingdom, the ten horns and the prostitute. And it says, the beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked. They will eat her flesh and burn her with fire. So that seems to be a picture of internal division within Satan's kingdom, where two parts of it gang up on a third part, shall we say. So it's not entirely inconceivable that there is self destructiveness in Satan's kingdom. But even in the book of Revelation, that isn't how it all ends. It's just a little partial bit of the winding story. So Jesus says, well that would be what you're saying for the first interpretation. But let's look at a second interpretation, but rather, he goes on to say, but rather. So let's look at this. This interpretation is of Satan under external attack by a superior power. And notice that Jesus is quite diffident about the way he expresses this superior external power, but that's definitely part of it. He says, let's look at a different picture. Let's look at a strong man who has a house with possessions in it, and let's look at a strong man who has a strong man who has a strong man who has a strong man.

And let's imagine somebody trying to rob the strong man. Now the only way you can get away with his things is to deal with the strong man. And you've got to be stronger still to do that.

And so Jesus says, in fact, but rather, 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. And that's the picture he gives this time. There's the strong man who's been bound with a chain with a padlock on it. He's been tied up.

[15 : 48] He can't do what he wants to do. And here is, well, here is somebody. You notice that Jesus doesn't even name this person. It's just a person enters the strong man's house and this person ties up the strong man. But obviously the person is Jesus, but he doesn't name himself in it. And he says, this person can take away what Satan had. Satan thought, I've got that. But the superior power ties him up, incapacitates him, limits him, and can take away the things that belong to Satan. And Jesus says, that's a second interpretation. And as we'll see in a moment, that's definitely the interpretation that Jesus is giving. He says, that's what you're witnessing. You are witnessing a superior power with a capital S and a capital P. You are witnessing a superior power who is binding the strong man so that he can't do what he wants. And the superior power is just taking out of Satan's kingdom what he wants. Interesting to compare it with Revelation 23, because I think it's an exact comparison.

In Revelation 23, without getting into the vexed questions, it seems to me that it's a description of the gospel, a description of what Jesus does in the gospel age. In Revelation 20, verse 2, it says that the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil or Satan, is bound for a thousand years. He threw them into the abyss, locked and sealed it over him to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. And it's a long period of time in which, in that little snippet from Revelation, Satan is tied up. And all that he used to do and wants to do, he can't do. And in particular, the nations. He used to blind them, but now they're undeceived.

And the gospel can go to all different nations, and people can have their eyes opened, and they can be snatched and pulled from Satan's kingdom by the one who ties up the strong man.

So I think that's an exact parallel there. But Jesus gives us these two interpretations then, either the internal division or the external attack. And then he doesn't leave us in doubt which of those two were to believe. He says, and if you believe the first one, if that's what you're going for, then just take this on board. 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.

[19 : 19] He is guilty of a sin to the age, an eternal sin, a forever sin. He said this because they were saying he has an evil spirit. So the first interpretation, which is to say that this whole Jesus thing, all that's going on is Satan. That's what the first interpretation is saying. All this Jesus thing is really a Satan thing. He does it by the power of the devil. But before we come to that, let's notice the second part of it, or actually the first part. I tell you the truth. This is one of the rare times in Mark's gospel where Jesus says, Amen. Meaning, here's a solemn statement. Take this on board.

All the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. Let's just ponder that one. All the sin, is that what, did I read that right? All the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them.

That's a statement, isn't it? I don't know whether you ever have had a trouble with your mouth, or whether you even still do, or with your thoughts, evil thoughts, evil things that might come out, which you would say it's a blasphemy. How on earth did I manage to say that?

Could I, how on, don't. But Jesus says, look, every single one of those, there's not a single sin or blasphemy that cannot be forgiven. All those horrible things that might have come out of your mouth, that might have arisen in your mind, that you might have only just choked back from saying, you might have thought, every single one will be forgiven. I think that's a thought worth pondering, isn't it? All the sins and blasphemies of men, the worst, foulest things that people could say, if you come to Jesus, is forgiven, wiped away, but with one exception. And the one exception is the exact thing that Jesus is referring to. It's not just a random thought that has popped out of somebody's mind. Notice the present tense, whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit. So he's not saying, you know, a random rudeness that came out of your mouth, or a random horrible thing that you happened to say or think under some peculiar situation. He's saying, this is your settled opinion. Whoever has this settled opinion that the Jesus thing is a Satan thing, there is no way you'll ever be forgiven that. And the reason there's no way you'll be forgiven is because the very means of forgiveness is to say that the Jesus thing is a God thing. That's the way you get there, and if you're not going to say that, you can't be forgiven because you've sort of sawn off the branch that you were sitting on. You've pulled the rug from under your feet. You've prevented yourself from ever finding forgiveness. And notice what Jesus says here. The way he puts it is to say this whole Jesus thing, all the things that Jesus is doing and saying, and the power that he's exerting, and the effects of it, what you're actually seeing is the Holy Spirit. And Jesus sort of contracts that into those stages into saying, well, what you're doing is blaspheming against the Holy Spirit.

[23 : 29] So sometimes people worry that they've committed this unforgivable sin. The unforgivable sin is exactly, as I've said, as I've said, as you take it all together. It's saying that the Jesus thing is a Satan thing. And having that as your settled view. And to do that is to rebel and to resist and to oppose the Holy Spirit in that exact way. And as Jesus says, there is no possible forgiveness for that ever, ever, ever, ever. They said that because he said he has an evil spirit.

So we learn from that that the Jesus thing, his activities and attitudes and achievements is in fact the focal point of the work of the Spirit. This is the work of the Spirit. Jesus is doing the work of the Spirit. And we learn that for a settled refusal, there is no forgiveness.

And I don't think that you would have been, you would be in the position of a settled refusal and have come along this evening. I think you would not be here. You wouldn't bother. So let's take that as a, as a warning. But I'm not going to try and pin that on anybody here because I don't think you would be here if you, if you had taken that, that view. You'd probably be outside throwing something. Let's come back to the other part of the sandwich, shall we? See if I can find the sheet. Let's come back to the family.

So there they were on the way and now we find that they've arrived. Verse 31. Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Please notice the wording. Standing outside, they sent, this is the word *apostello*, because Jesus had apostles which he sent, so they're doing the same thing using the same word. They sent someone in to call him. So they're calling on him in a sense.

[25 : 47] And a crowd was sitting round him. Notice they were standing outside. The crowd is sitting round him on the inside.

Sorry? Oh, I haven't got there yet. They're standing outside. They're standing outside. They've sent and called for him. It's a bit like praying, isn't it, to call for him. And on the inside, just look.

Verse 32. A crowd was sitting around him. They told him, your mother and brothers are outside seeking you.

It's not a bad thing to do. It's seeking Jesus. But Jesus is not at all sympathetic, really. He says, mother and brothers. Well, that's an interesting subject. Who are my mother and my brothers? And he looks round at those, how are they seated? In a circle. Verse 34. He looked round at those seated in a circle around him.

[27 : 07] So there's the picture. Seated in a circle around him. That's why I asked right at the beginning, how would you describe the geometry?

We're in a half circle. We're seated. You're not really seated round me. You're seated round the place where Jesus is speaking. That's the point, isn't it?

So we're not a million miles from that scene. And Jesus looks round at the people seated and listening, and he says, these are my mother and brothers.

This is my family. Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother.

It's a very clear distinction, isn't it? These people on the outside, the family, they mean well. They do what seems like some good things.

[28 : 11] They send. They call on him or to him and they seek him. And yet, it's almost so near and yet so far, there's something actually quite radically mistaken about their attitude.

There's a misunderstanding. There's, I think I would say, a disrespect for the person of Jesus. Because whatever else you could say about our relationship with Jesus, it would be quite wrong for us to try and sit Jesus down and talk sense into him, like they thought they could do.

We don't do that. We sit down and let him talk sense into us. We don't grab him and tell him this is what he ought to be doing. We let him take hold of us and tell us what we ought to be doing. They've got it seriously wrong, even though they mean it so well. Let's look at the people on the inside. They are sitting in a circle.

[29 : 19] It's a rather graphic picture, isn't it? They're sitting in a circle, seated round him. What a brilliant place to be. Seated at the feet of Jesus.

A bit like the Mary and Martha. Seated at the feet of Jesus, listening to his word. That's exactly what they're doing. I can't think of anything else they're doing. They're sitting, listening, aren't they? And Jesus sees these people in the act of sitting and listening.

And he says, that is my family. The people who are doing that are my family. And they might be rough old people.

They might actually not win beauty contests. They might have all sorts of, might not spell things properly. But I'm not ashamed to call them my brothers and sisters.

They're my people. The ones who sit round and listen to me. And he goes on a little bit further. And he says, well, they don't just sit and listen. They do it.

[30 : 25] Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother. So Jesus does cut it right down there, doesn't he? He says, I don't actually talk about people who only listen and don't do anything.

I'm talking about people who listen and then in some real way put it into practice. That's the difference between the man who built his house on the sand and the man who built his house on the rock, isn't it?

The rock isn't Jesus in this particular case. The rock is doing what he says. Both heard, but the one did it. And it is... It's almost unspiritual, actually, isn't it?

But it just cuts through a lot of baloney, actually. You're a Christian? Yeah. Do you ever do anything Christian? No.

How can you be a Christian? I love the Lord. Do you? Do you ever pray? Well, no, not really. Do you ever read the Bible? No, I don't. Do you ever come and meet with God's people?

[31 : 33] No. Do you ever put one foot in front of another in a Christian way? Not really, no. Well, how can you say you're a Christian? It's the people who actually do it.

It's not full of good intentions. You know, I've met lots of people who say, oh, I'm Christian. You know, I ask God to make sure I don't miss the bus. I do that every day. Yeah, interesting.

Do you ever open your Bible? No. No. I'm going to one day. One day I will. Do you ever actually put your alarm clock on and get up in time to do what it says and not forsake the assembling of yourselves together as the man of some is?

No, I never do that. I will one day. Well, to be honest, until you actually do it, it's baloney. I could use a more earthy word.

But it's rubbish. Until the point of action, it's nothing. Just talk. And Jesus says, well, no, the people who act, the people who do put one foot in front of another, they are my people.

[32 : 45] They're my family. They're my family. They're my family. So that was the other end of the sandwich. And somewhere here I have a conclusion.

With those three points. And here they are.

That's where we started. The three responses to Jesus. Who do you say that I am? And the three responses are these. The teachers of the law who come down from Jerusalem.

So they must know what they're talking about. They were the people of outright, perverse rejection. They didn't let the facts bother them.

They knew exactly what they knew they were going to know. And they said it. And for them, Jesus has this very stark sentence.

[33 : 49] There's no forgiveness for you. And there never ever will be. So long as that's the attitude you take. Doesn't hardly bear thinking about, does it?

Then there's this second category of well-meaning disrespect. And I think this is a very large category.

I suspect churches across the country have had, well I won't say full of, maybe some churches are full of, people who look as though they're doing sort of the right things.

Seeking Jesus. Calling on Jesus. Drawing near to Jesus. But, in their hearts, they're not going to do what Jesus says.

In their hearts they're saying, I think he really ought to have said this. Or they're saying, I think that was unacceptable. Or I couldn't follow the Bible on that, that's just fundamentalism.

[34 : 53] Or something like that. I couldn't believe that our God is a God of wrath. Something like that. Well-meaning perhaps, but actually fundamentally wrong. And Jesus says, I disown you.

You claim to be family. You think you're family. But actually, you're nothing to do with me at all. And that hardly bears thinking about as well, does it?

I think there must be countless people like that. Go along to church. And yet in the end Jesus says, you know, you're nothing to do with me at all. And I would like to encourage us with this third category.

What are they doing? They're sitting. They're listening. And they're doing. Notice that Jesus doesn't say a thing about how they feel about it.

It's very unemotional in that sense. I'm sure there were emotions. But he doesn't say the important thing is whether you feel it deeply. What he actually says is, do you do it? Which is a little bit counter-cultural for us because we think in a different way.

[36 : 09] But these are the people. Quoting Hebrews, he's not ashamed to call them brothers. That's a brilliant thing, isn't it? That Jesus would say, they're mine.

You're mine. You're my sister. You're my brother. Let's sing together.