

Jesus the restorer of life

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[0 : 00] Good morning. So we're on page 1010 and the passage is Mark chapter 3 verses 1 to 6.

Again he, that's Jesus, entered the synagogue and a man was there with a withered hand. And they watched Jesus to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him.

And he said to the man with the withered hand, come here.

And he said to them, is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill? But they were silent. And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, stretch out your hand. He stretched it out and his hand was restored.

The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him. Let's pray.

Father, we do thank you for this chance to come together and to hear your word and meditate on it.

Father, we ask that you would open our eyes to see the goodness of Jesus, see his truth.

[1 : 38] And especially we pray this morning that you would strengthen and grow our faith, that we might continue to follow him even in a world that doesn't. And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, we've been looking at the goodness of Jesus in the last three weeks or so. But the thing is, it can be hard when Jesus is so good and yet so many reject him.

And it can raise questions. Like, have we got it right? Why do so many reject him even though all he is offering is goodness and life?

Our subject this morning is the immediate opposition of the Jewish leaders to Jesus. Just look down at verse 6. The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

There was a coalition of people who didn't have much love for one another, the Herodians and the Pharisees.

[3 : 00] You can imagine the Labour cabinet and the Tory cabinet getting together, united in their desire to get rid of Jesus.

One of the things that stands out here is how soon it is in the ministry of Jesus. Do you see that?

Chapter 3, verse 6. Jesus has only just begun to reveal himself. And yet, here we are with the leaders, Jewish leaders plotting to kill him.

It may come as a surprise to some of us here today, looking into the Christian faith, that Jesus Christ was not welcomed with open arms by gullible, pre-scientific people who would believe in anything.

That's what people often think today. That belief in Christ as the Son of God is for a bygone era, for when we didn't know what we do now about science and how the world works.

[4 : 04] One of the reasons that narrative doesn't deal with the facts is that they didn't accept him back then either. This opposition to Jesus had been building, and I just want to show us that, building over the last few chapters.

Come back to chapter 2, verse 6, verse 7, sorry, chapter 2, verse 7. We get these four why questions. So Jesus says to the paralysed man, son, your sins are forgiven.

Verse 7, why does this man speak like that? He's blaspheming. Now come to 2, verse 15. Jesus reclines with tax collectors and sinners.

And then verse 16, why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners? 2, verse 18. Why do John's disciples and the disciples fast, but your disciples do not fast?

2, verse 24. Why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath? Why, why, why, why? 3, verse 1.

[5 : 21] The questions have stopped. You see that? And they're just watching and waiting for Jesus to trap him.

There's no question in this one. Jesus heals this man on the Sabbath of his withered hand. And the leaders from those two religious groups immediately take counsel how to destroy him.

I wonder if you can imagine it. I've been trying to think. We're not given the details. What do they do? Do they wait for Jesus to leave the synagogue and then gather in a corner? Or do they go out around the corner and start to plot, how can we get rid of this man?

Why did they reject him? Why do people dismiss him today? Well, through this section, we can learn three very clear lessons about why people reject Christ.

And it is not for the reasons that we would expect. Why do people reject Christ? Number one, not because of lack of evidence. Do you see this in verse 2?

[6 : 30] It's extraordinary, isn't it? Verse 2, look again. They watched Jesus to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath so that they might accuse him.

Do you see what's happening there? Jesus' miracle would be the basis of their accusation. They were in no doubt he could do it.

That's why they were there. They were expecting him to do it. Now, that is quite shocking, isn't it? Of course, they could not deny that he was doing miracles that only someone acting with the creator's power could do.

They weren't even trying to deny it. In fact, they were banking on it. And so they did not reject him because he was not providing evidence for his claims to be the son of God, who could bring life, who could bring Sabbath rest, who could bring a kingdom of joy and healing from sin.

The assumption of many today is that that is why we, as a culture, have disposed of Jesus. The narrative goes something like this.

[7 : 47] We've had the enlightenment and science, the rise of science, and we've realized that the evidence for Jesus, well, it's insufficient. But the reality is that despite 150 years of scrutiny and text criticism on these gospel accounts, they still stand.

When people look at the life of Christ with humility and an open mind, they find that the evidence for who he is remains overwhelming.

Overwhelming. And this, of course, is shown by the fact that people, even today, from all walks of life, educated, uneducated, are coming to faith in Jesus.

I heard of, in the last couple of years, MIT professor Rosalind Pickard says this. She says, when you encounter the truth, there is something inside you that sings.

Speaking of reading the Bible, she was an atheist. She's come to faith in Jesus in the last couple of years. She says this. She says, the scientific method is not the only way to ascertain truth.

[9 : 09] It is limited. And when people claim that science can tell you all truth, there's a name for that, and that's scientism. These eyewitness testimonies of Jesus still stand up, and there is simply no reasonable way to refute them.

And so, even today, it is not because of lack of evidence that people reject Christ. Hence, by the way, I think that the failure of new atheism, do you remember the storm around Richard Dawkins and the God delusion and some of the other guys, Sam Harris?

I was reading a book recently called *The Surprising Rebirth of Belief in God*, which traces, actually, that most of those who would have followed the ideas of Dawkins have now moved away from him, the younger generation coming through.

I remember reading *The God Delusion* and being surprised to see in a book of 300 pages, there were only four pages given to examining the actual evidence of the Gospels.

Why? Why? Why? Why? Why? Why? Well, they stand up. And back then, they did not get rid of Jesus because of a lack of evidence.

[10 : 35] And neither is that the case today. It's not the true reason. So, firstly, not because of a lack of evidence. And secondly, not because he isn't good.

Do you see that in verse 2? Again, the same verse. They were waiting to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath. So it's not just that they were waiting for him to do a miracle.

They were waiting for him to do a miracle of healing that would restore a man's body. Jesus is good.

The goodness of Jesus. He'd been cast. What had they seen of him? He'd been casting out demons. Getting rid of evil. He'd healed a whole town of various diseases.

He'd healed a man with leprosy. He'd raised a paralytic. He'd said, declared himself to be one who could forgive sins. the doctor for sin, the bridegroom bringing joy, the Lord of the Sabbath.

[11:49] That's what they'd seen of Jesus. And so, was Jesus coming and saying that he would spoil their lives? No. But they would rather be without him.

You see that? Even though Jesus was showing them that with him they could have hope not just in this life but in eternity. Isn't it baffling?

We do not reject Jesus because he's not good. He is the best and most wonderful person who's ever lived. He brought healing and restoration of the broken wherever he went. He offers it to all people.

Eternal life. A place in his kingdom. And yet, so, if they did not reject Christ their Messiah because of lack of evidence or because he was not good then why did they reject him?

And here we will find one of the real answers to why people still refuse him today. Number three, because he does not confirm us in our self-righteousness. What was it that led them to be lying in wait for him on that Sabbath?

[13:09] It was the previous encounters. It's the context. The Pharisees were convinced that they were good. Why? Because they had their religious rules that they'd created which was actually formalism.

Things to do or not to do. Boxes to tick. That meant that they thought they were righteous in the eyes of God. 39 categories of work that they were not to do on the Sabbath.

Today we have the same thing. We might not call it religion but really it is secular humanism and there are certain boxes that we tick to persuade ourselves that we're good. We're tolerant.

We care about the environment or whatever it is. What is the message of every Disney Pixar film that seems to come out these days?

I've seen all of them I think probably. We're good. We're good. I don't know if you've seen Inside Out. Some may have seen that film.

[14:13] I've made myself very unpopular in my family. I mean it's good in lots of ways. It's a good piece of art. But I came away saying I think it's tedious that the whole thing which didn't go down well with the boys or with Anna in fact.

But the fundamental message of both of those films were good. Jesus when he came acted in a way that suggested that everything that they were doing to make themselves right with God was worth nothing.

He did not eat with them but with notorious sinners who didn't care two hoops about the rules of the Pharisees. He allowed his disciples to ignore their fasts and he allowed his disciples to pluck grain on the Sabbath which he would have known was in direct contradiction to their rules.

And they began to hate him for it. Why? Because he was saying that all they were doing counted for nothing.

Zip. He did not tell them what they wanted to hear about themselves which is that they're good.

[15:45] Congratulations. You're righteous and all your religion makes you righteous before God. He did not confirm them in their self-righteous religion.

Instead he said you need to leave all that behind and come to me. Come to me for forgiveness like everybody else.

And with that he swept away not only the rules that they'd made up for themselves but even the law of Moses and instead saying I'm the one you need out with the old in with the new.

And that was too much for them. And so that's why they'd reached the point at this stage in chapter three verse one and two that's why they'd reached the point where they didn't care that he was giving them evidence.

They didn't care that he was good. They didn't care about the truth. And look down at verse five verse four Jesus asks this question.

[16:57] He said to them is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm to save life or to kill? They know the answer but they stay silent.

I wonder do you think they realized when Jesus asked that question? Do you think they realized how double-edged it was? The irony that they're accusing him of breaking the fourth commandment the Sabbath while they plan to break the sixth do not murder.

So Jesus is actually saying to them is it lawful on the Sabbath to do what I'm doing to save life or to do what you're doing to kill?

What a question. And with that question he cuts through the external show of their religion and exposes them as neither caring about the truth nor God's commands nor God himself.

they are not the good people that they think they are. And yet even with that exposure all they wanted to do was to get rid of him to hold on to their self-righteousness and their self-righteous religion so that they could go on believing themselves to be good perfectly fine without a savior. [18:31] which is why Jesus responds as he does. Do you see that? In verse five. Jesus looked round at them with anger grieved at their hardness of heart.

Why is Jesus angry? Because of their hardness of heart. What is hardness of heart? Well that phrase refers to immovable spiritual pride. heart as a diamond. That is the root issue. The root issue for their rejection of him is a proud refusal of God and his grace.

It is the heart that says no I refuse you God. Though he stands before us holding out the arms of his love and salvation.

Why is Jesus angry? It is the anger the righteous anger of a holy God who's done everything he can for his people and now the son has come down to save them and still they say no.

[19:45] Well notice also the grief and this has struck me this time the grief of Jesus. Do you see that in verse five? Grieved. Now I think this is remarkable.

even at this point he cares about them he loves them even his enemies who are plotting to kill him he's grieved.

Isn't that amazing? The love of Jesus he does not want them to refuse their only hope and yet that is what they're doing.

Do you see that? So why do people really reject Jesus? It is because he doesn't tell us what we want to hear about ourselves.

He sweeps away our self-righteous religion and he says instead you need me. And that is humbling and for many it's too much.

[20:50] I just want to pause on two implications. Number one an expectation or in fact two expectations. So a dual reaction and a context for faith.

Do you notice this? Firstly a dual reaction. It's the more he revealed himself to them the more they wanted to get rid of him. Now I don't know for many of us who are Christians do you remember when you first came to faith in Jesus.

I remember this as a 14 year old and I thought I'd go back to school and all I had to do was to explain to people that God loved them and that Christ had died for them and there was eternal life and everyone would come to faith.

Some of us may remember that. It doesn't last long. Of course what we see here is we might assume that all people need is to hear about Jesus.

Actually it's the other way around. As people hear about Jesus there will be a dual reaction. Some people will follow after him but many will actually as he reveals himself more and more will harden and harden and harden and harden.

[22:11] No one can stay neutral for long. Many of you in your workplaces there's an apathy. there seems to be neutrality. Neutrality is usually because people don't know.

It is normal for that dual reaction expected. But secondly this the context of faith. So the Pharisees back then they were the brightest and the best.

They were the leading lights. They were the ones to whom everyone looked for they were the opinion leaders if you like. The academics the poets the journalists the politicians all rolled into one. And so the Christian must live out their faith in the context of a society where the leading lights reject Christ.

Christ. I remember that video of Stephen Fry. Some of you may have seen it ten years ago. Really railing against the God of the Bible.

[23:18] Ricky Gervais. I mean I don't want to single people out but the list would go on. Brother or sister don't be discouraged by the reaction of the Pharisees to Jesus.

It is not their minds great as they may be but their hearts that reject him. And then finally a question to all of us.

And I think this question this passage poses this question to all of us. that's what they did with him. But what about you? What they did with Jesus was not right.

It was not honest. It was not true. What will you do? Jesus is good. He is the doctor for sinners. The bridegroom.

The Lord of the Sabbath. He's proven himself with many miracles. He's died on the cross. He's risen. He offers us life. Why would we not repent and believe?

[24 : 32] The only reason is a proud heart. And it might be that there's someone here who's been coming along to church and hearing the gospel and for you, you feel ready.

Well, today would be a great day to repent, come back to God and find the welcome that you long for. Let's pray.

Father in heaven, we thank you that Jesus is good and truly is the son of God. God, please protect us from hardening our hearts against him.

Thank you for softening our hearts by your grace. And we pray that you would please help us to go on believing in and following the Lord Jesus in the context of a world and a society that so often hardens against him.

And we ask it in his name. Amen.