

Amazing Responses

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- [0 : 0 0] It's a great song, isn't it? And I hope you're getting into the spirit in your mind. We're in a football dressing room, at least for a few moments, and the premiership has just been won.
- I want you to see in your mind the jubilant faces in the players' circle. There's Voss, there's Akemanis, there's Lynch, there's Brown. The Lions have just won their third premiership in a row. Amazing.
- We're not even interested in what happened in Perth last night. Three premierships in a row. And the players, they're standing shoulder to shoulder, and they're bellowing out the Lions' song.
- What a celebration. What joy. What exuberance. And this smelly dressing room, it's literally vibrating with the voices of the triumphant players.
- And all sorts of hangers-on are trying to get into the players' circle. And then the circle's broken. A balding man, he's built a bit like a Sherman tank, with massive arms, he strides into the centre, scowling.
- [1 : 0 9] Scowling at the players. The players are perplexed. They keep singing until Lethal motions with these huge arms and he shouts, enough!
- Silence descends on the triumphant dressing room. And the silence is broken by Lethal Lee's bark. That's enough. This is no time to celebrate.
- Who do you think you are? I'll tell you when to start celebrating. When we've won a few more premierships. Follow me. We're going back into the briefing room. I want to go through the mistakes we've made in the match.
- Well, as Lethal strides forward, the cowering players, they anxiously follow him. And you can just hear some muffled voices.
- I mean, this is crazy. I mean, this is amazing. We've just won three premierships. I mean, what is it with Lethal? I mean, why on earth is he acting like this? Why is he responding like this?
- [2 : 0 9] This is amazing. It's hard to believe, isn't it? I mean, if you're a Hawthorne supporter or a Lion supporter, it's nearly impossible to believe that Lethal would act like that. But friends, some responses in real life are, well, they're simply extraordinary.
- They're amazing. And in our passage today, and if you'd turn with me to page 814, Mark chapter 3, we encounter four responses to Jesus and they're four different responses.
- And the structure of the passage can be broken down into four units. In verses 1 to 6, we see the response of the Jewish leaders. And in 7 to 10, the response of the crowd.
- And in 11 verses 11 and 12, the response of the unclean spirits. And then finally, the response of the disciples. And these four responses can be categorised into two broad groups.
- And the first group I want us to consider is the response of the Jewish leaders and the unclean spirits. You see, the Pharisees, they are in the winning dressing room.

[3 : 21] But are they celebrating the arrival of the Messiah? As we come to this chapter 3, we're actually in the second of two Sabbath controversies.

And the flower of the narrative suggests that after Jesus and his disciples had finished their controversial walk through the cornfields, as we looked at last week at the end of chapter 2, they return to the synagogue.

It's likely to be in Capernaum. And it's on the same Sabbath. And in the synagogue, there's a man with a withered hand. And we've already had such an excellent visual demonstration of a withered hand.

Because the word, in fact, does denote stiffness. It denotes deformity. And the Jews would have likely interpreted this as the result of unconfessed sin in the man's life.

And Mark records that the Pharisees, verse 2, watched Jesus to see whether he would cure him on the Sabbath. So that they might accuse him.

[4 : 19] I mean, Jesus had previously healed on the Sabbath. But opposition to Jesus has been growing. And it's been growing, in fact, as his popularity has been increasing. Increasing throughout Galilee and also further regions.

And the opposition is seen in four questions. Four questions that are posed by the Pharisees as you go through chapter 2. You recall when Jesus pronounced the sins of the leper forgiven.

The teachers of the Law accused Jesus in their hearts of the sin of blasphemy. Who can forgive sins but God alone? And then the antagonism grew as Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners.

Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners? And then last week we saw the question put to Jesus. Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast?

But your disciples do not fast. And then finally that accusation that Jesus' disciples were in fact breaking the Sabbath. By plucking grain to eat.

[5 : 23] Why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath? The Pharisees were in effect old wineskins.

They couldn't handle the real thing. In their legalistic, pietistic self-righteousness, they'd squeeze the very life and purpose out of the Sabbath.

They were blind to God's revelation. But the Sabbath was made for humankind and not humankind for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.

But the Pharisees, they were acting true to their sinful nature. When they used the suffering condition of a man in the synagogue to try and trap Jesus.

Here are the religious leaders and they're using a handicapped man. They're using him as what? They're using him as bait. Legalism is a life-sapping scourge.

[6 : 28] It does rear its head from time to time in the history of the broader church. Legalism often has this veneer of being concerned for God's holiness.

But typically on closer inspection you find that there are massive doses of self-righteousness. And of man being the arbiter of what is right before God.

And it's characterised of course by long lists of man-made requirements and rules. It's a blight on the body of Christ and a massive turn-off to any unsaved person who's looking in on the church.

So how do we individually and corporately prevent the scourge of legalism? By remaining humble before God and humble before his word.

Enjoying the freedom that is genuinely ours in Christ without abusing God's marvellous grace in our life. Being free in Christ and still living a life that is pleasing to the Lord.

- [7 : 36] All the Pharisees in verse 2 watched Jesus to see whether he would cure him on the Sabbath. So that they might accuse him.
- That is an amazing response isn't it? Stop singing the grand final club song. Snuff the very life out of Jesus.
- The man who's bringing to the countryside the proclamation of the good news. Healing the sick. Teaching with authority from the Old Testament. Driving out demons.
- Let's accuse him. It's amazing. Catch also the irony of this situation. The authorities are seeking to deny Jesus the right to do good on the Sabbath while they conspire to do evil.
- Don't miss the deadliness. The deadliness of spiritual blindness. Jesus is going to act in a very, very public way.
- [8 : 41] And he's going to reveal something more than just compassion. More than just power. He's declaring his lordship. His lordship over all. And he takes the initiative.
- And he says to the man with the withered hand. Come forward. Of course we've already witnessed Jesus' compassion haven't we? In the first couple of chapters of Mark's gospel.
- So we shouldn't be surprised by that command. To this poor suffering handicapped man. Come forward. Jesus came to give life. To save life.
- And Jesus continues in this very public setting to go on the front foot. Notice his confronting question that he puts to the Pharisees. Verse 4.
- Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath? To save life or to kill? The point is doing good isn't limited to just certain days.
- [9 : 38] Well how did the Pharisees response? I want you to consider their response in this metaphorical context of being in the winning dressing room after a grand final.
- Because their response is amazing. In fact it's diabolical. Their response is one of silence. Deafening silence.
- 110 decibels of silence. Refraining from doing good is effectively to do evil.
- It's to pick death over life. Verse 5. Jesus looked around at them with anger. That is some statement in scripture.
- He is the living God in human flesh and he's standing before them and he's angry. And Mark records that Jesus was grieved at their hardness of heart.
- [10 : 44] Stickless for their interpretation of the law and absolutely lacking mercy. Jesus clashed with the authorities.
- It wasn't over the rules but over who rules. Jesus is the Lord. He's the Lord of all. Including the law. And he exposes the religious leaders sinister wickedness.
- But I don't know. Maybe we sit back and say these authorities were just a little misguided. But Jesus will have none of that.
- The Pharisees were dead to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. They were in the kingdom of darkness. And the Bible again and again and again through the pages of scripture makes it clear that everyone who's outside of a relationship with Jesus Christ is outside of the kingdom of God.
- And perhaps this morning I'm speaking to someone and you know in your heart that you are continuing to reject following Jesus Christ. If that is the case, let me encourage you to closely examine that response in your heart.
- [11 : 59] Because it's rebellion. It's rebellion to the one true living God. Come to the saviour today. Come to the only one who can give life.
- Abundant life. Well Mark tells us that Jesus said to the man in the synagogue, stretch out your hand. And he stretched it out and his hand was restored.

Amazing. Another amazing miracle. Another extraordinary miracle. A display of compassion. A display of power. A display of Jesus' Lordship.

Well, perhaps now the Pharisees will join in the song of celebration. Perhaps they'll let the light of the glory of Jesus Christ shine into their bleak, deadly darkness.

Will they? Mark tells us in verse 6, the Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him how to destroy Jesus.

[13 : 12] Unbelievable. Amazing. Mind-boggling stupidity. In their spiritual blindness, the religious leaders, they collude with the unholy Herodians to kill Jesus.

Of course, the groundwork is being laid for the passion and death of God's Son. The verdict to do away with him, in fact, was decided here. Not in Jerusalem many months later.

Spiritual blindness does take you down a blind alley, which is very, very dark. Rejecting the truth leads to being haters of the truth, to being lovers of evil.

Well, in verses 11 and 12, what's the response to the demonic world to this man Jesus of Nazareth? Verse 11, whenever the unclean spirits saw Jesus, they fell down before him.

These unclean spirits, these demonic spirits, what do they do? They confess Jesus' sovereignty by their subjection. Don't be misled on this.

[14 : 23] This is not worship. But they are recognising that they're in the presence of the Almighty Lord of heaven and earth. And the demons particularly express their subjection by their declaration.

You are the Son of God. Back in the first chapter of Mark, verse 11, you recall that Jesus' baptism, there's this voice that comes from heaven in declaration, you are my Son, the Beloved.

With you I'm well pleased. The demons' voices are always off key. I mean, their confession is orthodox. But they're not well pleased at being in the presence of Jesus.

They are enemies of Jesus Christ. They are enemies of the Church. They are enemies of every Christian. But Jesus is the Lord of all.

He has divine authority over evil. And friends, that ought to bring massive encouragement to every Christian who's gathered here this morning. Jesus' authority over the demonic world is absolute.

[15 : 36] It's total. And Jesus sternly ordered them not to make him known. You see, the demon's declaration was correct, but the demons are not to be the announcers of God's revelation.

There was much that the people of Palestine and particularly the disciples still needed to understand about Jesus. The fact that he would die on a Roman cross as a perfect, atoning sacrifice for our sins and then rise again.

It is a great truth, isn't it? That Jesus is the Son of God. Not just that he's a great prophet, not that he's just a great miracle worker, not that he's just a good person, but very God, very man, crucified, resurrected and reigning.

As you consider then this account, what is your response to the God-man, to Jesus Christ, to the Son of God?

Let's then look at the second group. A group that I've put together being both the crowd and also the disciples. And we'll firstly look at the response of the crowd in verses 7 to 10.

[17 : 05] After the antagonism of the Pharisees conspiring with the Herodians to kill Jesus, Jesus withdraws and takes his disciples to the sea. But Jesus can't escape the immense popularity.

People are converging on him. They're coming from the south, they're coming from the east and they're coming from the two northern cities of Tyre and Sidon. In fact, that geographical area matches the old Israel.

And the crowd are seeking a miracle worker. Their interest in Jesus would seem to be very self-serving. They want a little bit of magic. In verse 10, Mark tells us that they pressed upon him to touch him.

But look, this was a massive response. This was an amazing response. Some commentators suggest that perhaps tens of thousands of people from this greater region had converged.

And they're crushing in on him. And the word has the sense of mobbing, of pressing forward. And maybe to get a sense of what that crowd was like, two images come to mind.

[18 : 11] One is a regular image that we see each boxing day with those massive crowds at the door of Myers, pressing against the glass and the security, rushing to get in to buy a 50 cent pair of socks.

But more recently, I think the scene is, in my mind, is of Chappelle Corby being led into a Bali courtroom with reporters and supporters just jostling and pressing in on her.

We need to see though that the response of this immense crowd in Palestine wasn't a response of repentance and faith. Because in verse 8 we read that their interest in coming to Jesus was in all that he was doing.

But in demonstration of the compassionate heart of God, the compassionate heart of God that in fact we were reminded of in Psalm 145 this morning, Jesus does meet their physical needs.

But there's little evidence as you go through Mark's Gospel that the crowds in Palestine were interested in spiritual healing. Jesus' mission of course was primarily one of preaching.

[19 : 23] It was one of proclaiming the good news of the need for repentance and faith as we read about in verses 14 and 15 of chapter 1. physical healing of which there was much was only secondary in Jesus' mission.

An integral part of Jesus' mission was calling followers. That's what he did over 2,000 years ago and friends that's what he continues to do even on the 17th of July 2005 at Holy Trinity Doncaster.

Jesus continues to call followers. In verse 13 Mark records that Jesus went up the mountain and called to him those whom he wanted and they came to him.

This is rich imagery. You see throughout Mark's Gospel mountains are often sites of revelation. They are scenes of importance in Jesus' ministry.

And the call of the disciples to come up the mountain to Jesus recalls Moses' ascent to Mount Sinai to meet Yahweh and receive the Ten Commandments.

[20 : 38] And we've already seen, haven't we, in the early chapters of Mark those themes of Jesus' authority, themes of Jesus' sonship. But there's also been this emerging theme of following Jesus.

In chapter 1 there were four fishermen that were called. In chapter 2 there was a tax collector that was called. And now here in chapter 3 verse 14 we read Jesus appointed twelve whom he also named apostles to be with him and to be sent out to proclaim the message and to have the authority to cast out demons.

And this word authority has the sense of making or creating. And again we're reminded of the Lord appointing Moses and Aaron in the leadership of the nation of Israel.

And again the twelve have symbolic significance. They're pointing to the new Israel. Notice what the twelve were picked for. They were picked firstly to be with Jesus and secondly to proclaim Christ's message of the kingdom of God and to cast out demons.

these were ordinary people these twelve that were called. Very ordinary people. And some and particularly Judas failed terribly.

[21 : 59] They failed diabolically in their calling. But not withstanding the failures of the twelve diabolical failures like Judas but struggles with John and James and Peter and maybe others but they're the ones that are recorded in scripture.

Notwithstanding those failures God's purposes haven't been thwarted. Through the presence through the power of the Holy Spirit the church just continues to expand through the centuries throughout the globe.

And each one of us each one of us that are here this morning who are followers of Jesus Christ each of us are actually called to be disciple makers. But I wonder in saying that whether that's the way you see your role in the world I mean your gifts that have been sovereignly given to you by the Holy Spirit they may be different to the Christian friend who's sitting next to you.

But the mission for each of us as Christ followers is the same and that's to proclaim the good news in word and also in deed. what is your response then to this man this Jesus of Nazareth the one declared to be the son of God the one in whom God the Father is well pleased what is your response for some people of course the response is simply aggressive opposition aggressive opposition to Christ like the Pharisees.

The French philosopher and deist of the 18th century Voltaire sought to demolish Christianity by his writings. He often boasted that in 20 years Christianity will be no more and of Christ he said curse the wretch.

[23 : 55] church. It's interesting that within 20 years of Voltaire's death his house the house that was used to print this blasphemous literature became the depot the depot for the Geneva Bible Society.

Your response may be active opposition like the Pharisees but often it's seen as passive indifference. Perhaps it's a bit like being part of a crowd and as you think about that in our context maybe just being part of your local church.

It might be being part of Holy Trinity Doncaster. I mean the company around here is pretty good. You've probably got lots of friends and there's certainly a great range of activities week in and week out.

But in your heart you know that you continue to resist making a personal commitment to Jesus Christ. Like the crowd in Palestine you don't respond to Christ in faith and repentance.

Friend if that is your situation do a spiritual health check this morning. What's holding you back from Christ? Jesus is life indeed he is the only source of life.

[25 : 13] Wonder what mind games the kingdom of darkness continues to play with you. Remember Satan is a liar and he's the father of all lies.

Come to Jesus. Follow him. He is the author of life. Before I committed my life to Christ I need to declare to you I'd manufactured in my mind lots of artificial hurdles.

Lots of ridiculous obstacles. Silly ridiculous obstacles going round and round in my mind. obstacles that stopped me from embracing the love of God in Jesus Christ.

Today as I look back I can't imagine going through life without Jesus Christ. And I'm glad that I came into that player circle.

That player circle of which millions of Christians around the world and even this day in the different time zones declaring that Jesus is Lord.

[26 : 17] but for the vast majority that are here this morning hearing this great chapter of Mark chapter 3 the reality is you've been faithfully following Jesus for years.

Some of you for many years for many decades. And the call to each one of you is still the same. The call is keep following.

Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus and be active. be active in his mission. The most amazing response in the whole of the universe is that a holy God should love us so much that he'd send his son.

That he'd send his son to die on a cross to pay the price of our sins to be our saviour. Join in that grand final song.

I mean how amazing how stunning if we turn away from being part of the winning team. Victory now victory for all of eternity.

[27 : 35] What is your response to Jesus Christ? God our father we thank you for your word.

We thank you that in your extraordinary love you sent your son the Lord Jesus Christ to be our saviour to die on a cross to pay the price for our sins.

Lord I pray for anyone here this morning who has regularly heard the gospel but has not been prepared to turn from their sins and put their faith in Christ.

Lord I pray that by your powerful spirit you would work strongly in the hearts of such ones today and they would become committed followers of the Lord Jesus.

Jesus and Lord for the many who are here who are faithful followers of the Lord Jesus, faithful followers for many years Lord I pray that they would be encouraged to continue to keep their eyes fixed on the Lord that they would continue just to have that great mission before them of being disciple makers in the world and we pray this for the glory and sake of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[28 : 57] Amen. Amen.