

The Normal Evangelism Experience

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[0 : 00] Well, let's read together from God's Word before we hear from it. Mark chapter 6, verses 1 to 29. You'll find that on page 841 of Black Church Bibles if you've got one on the way in.

841, Mark chapter 6, verses 1 to 29. 1 to 30.

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[4 : 39] 19. 20. 21. 22. 22. 24. 22. 23. 23. 22. 22.

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25. 23. 22. 23. 24. 23. will, even now. So give us energy to listen and keep us from distractions. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. Well, I'm sure you've all heard of a show called Dragon's Den. Yes? Yes, absolutely. Nods roll around. If you haven't, well, in short, there are five potential investors. They receive a pitch by an entrepreneur, and they're to assess whether they'd like to invest. Do they like the idea? Do they like the entrepreneur? Do they think it will make money? All of that. And often you'll hear some success stories, some businesses that go on to do really well because of these investments.

But sometimes these dragons, as they are called, they miss out big time. I was going through a list online of numerous ideas that they either kind of ridiculed on TV or they never even gave a hearing on the show. Ideas that are now making millions and millions of pounds. Two stood out to me. You might know them. First of all, there's Trunky. If you've ever heard of Trunky, it's because you have kids and you're at the airport. It's kind of kids, you know, luggage with wheels to keep them entertained as you go through the different terminals, etc. A really successful business idea ridiculed by these guys and gals on TV. And there's another one, perhaps most notably.

[6 : 38] Brewdog apparently applied to be on the show, and they were going to offer 20% of their business, which is now reportedly over £2 billion, but they were rejected from ever entering. And as we hear that, we're left thinking, kind of, I thought these industry giants, they knew their stuff. And yet they're capable of such bad decisions. They've missed out big time.

Why didn't they see the potential in these businesses? Well, for some reason, they did not have the foresight to see the value in what they were being presented.

The same thing is happening in this passage in Mark. Jesus, the disciples, John the Baptist, they've been out proclaiming the good news of the gospel. The kingdom is here, repent and believe.

But they're rejected, they're ridiculed, and even killed. This evening, we're going to see some of the reasons for that rejection played out. Mark records them for us. And as we read of them, we're really just dumbfounded, aren't we? Is this really why you're not going to invest? Is this really why you're not going to repent and believe? What these are, I think, in the flow of Mark's account, are bad soils. You'll know the parable very well, the parable of the sower. Jesus taught that in chapter

4. It's really a parable about the reality of gospel progress. There will be exponential growth when the seed finds good soil. It's amazing. It's wonderful. But good soil is actually not that easy to find. There's lots of bad soil everywhere. Those who were listening at the time, they asked Jesus more questions. They wanted to know more. Those who weren't listening and couldn't care less, they were deaf to these truths coming from Jesus' lips, and they remained deaf.

In chapter 5, the chapter following that, Mark records some really positive responses to the gospel in Gentile territory. There is some good soil to be found. You'll remember the stories, won't you? There's the man that was restored to sanity, and he was rid of the demons that were perturbing him. You know, he was chained up, and he was living among the tombs and all that. You'll remember that story. He was restored to sanity, and in his faith, wanted to tell everyone, about Jesus. There was the faith of the woman with the bleeding who knew that Jesus was her only hope, and so she touched the edge of his garment. There was the faith also of Jairus, who fell at Jesus' feet, pleading for his daughter. In contrast to all of that in chapter 5, we get to chapter 6.

[9 : 46] Jesus returns home to his family, the Jews, and we see here four different types of tragic responses.

And as we think about them in turn, maybe you'll be able to think of some parallel experiences that you've had. And this is the point of this evening's sermon. This is what it's like. This is what Jesus experienced. This is what the disciples experienced. This is what John the Baptist experienced. And this is what all of Jesus' disciples are to experience in their evangelism. There is bad soil everywhere, and we need to know that that's the case, so that we are not discouraged when we come across it, but we are confident that we are not missing a trick, that we are not wasting our time, but so that we would know that Jesus himself experienced this. And he expects his disciples to experience the same. Because bad soil is real, but good soil is present as well. Rejection and opposition to the gospel is normal. We need to be ready for it. We need to be ready for it. It's real. This morning, we heard the call to evangelism, go and speak. That's all you need to do.

Tonight, we're reminded of the reality of it. It can be really hard. Hopefully you see and all that will make sense to you in time. Let's look through these responses in turn. You've seen them up on the screen as well. Some listeners are needlessly skeptical and offended.

Verses 1 to 6. Well, Jesus returns from a Gentile land, we've mentioned that, to his homeland, really, the Jewish land. And on the Sabbath, as the community met in the synagogue, Jesus begins to teach. And the reactions to his teaching seem really positive to begin with, don't they? Verse 2 tells us that people were amazed, that they recognized the wisdom, and they marveled at his miracles. But then, the reaction turns negative. Have a look at verse 3.

[12 : 19] Is this not that the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James, and Joseph, and Judas, and Simon, are not his sisters here with us? And they took offense at him.

Now, they don't mind Jesus being the carpenter, son of Mary. That's been the case for 30 years. He was the one that kind of fixes my bed and builds my furniture. But as soon as he returns home, with clearly discernible power and authority, they reject him. Why? Well, it seems like they'll accept him so long as he conforms to their expectations of him. He's a carpenter, right? Not a king.

They're used to him, but they don't want to be challenged by him. They don't see that as his place. And you perhaps have some sympathy with the skepticism on the part of Jesus' family and friends. Were it not for the fact that miracles were happening before their eyes, and his teaching was wisdom like they'd never heard anywhere else? The response of the Gentiles in the Gentile land of chapter 5 was much better than this. It was correct. It was appropriate. It was fear and faith.

Here, home, we have dismissal and offense. And the response from Jesus is just sheer astonishment. Have a look at verses 5 and 6. Let me read them for us.

[14 : 01] Mark records, He could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. And he marveled because of their unbelief.

Now, those verses aren't a comment about Jesus' ability to do miracles. We've seen that Jesus can do miracles whenever he wants, wherever he wants.

Rather, I think that is a comment that is representative of the pattern that we've seen in Mark. Just like with the parables in chapter 4. If you want to hear more, you get to hear more. You get more.

If you don't want to hear, and if you don't care, well, you'll remain on the outside. And you'll never see. Jesus' reaction is somewhat of a mirror of that truth.

The amazing thing, really, that we should be marveling in is that he continued to perform miracles at all. His reluctance to heal is judgment on unbelief.

[15:05] If you don't want it, okay, you won't get it. And that's really sad and tragic. Why?

Because they know him. He's been with them all his life. They know his family, his brothers and his sisters. Maybe you know someone that used to come to church.

until the gospel wasn't to their liking. Jesus was good as a moral guide, maybe a spiritual source of support.

But when the king's authority is proclaimed and repentance is called for, they walk away. And it's tragic, isn't it?

Because they've had all this time with him, yet they don't know him. That's the first reaction.

[16:11] Let's have a look at the second one. Some refuse to listen in the first place. Jesus isn't put off. He's still keen to continue in his priority to teach and to preach as far as, and as wide as possible.

So he sends out the twelve disciples as a means of kind of multiplying ministry. That makes sense, doesn't it? So he gathers them in for a little pep talk before they head off as a means of kind of just, you know, tempering their expectations.

And so beginning in verse eight, we read that they were to be reliant upon the Lord and they were to expect hospitality and an audience wherever they went. However, they were also to expect no hospitality and no audience.

Have a look at verse 11. And if any place will not receive you and they will not listen to you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.

In some places, people will just not want you. They won't want to listen to you. They won't even want to be around you.

[17:22] And to refuse hospitality in the culture as was the case back then would have been a really bold thing to do. And this reaction is such a shame because if we have a glance at verses 12 and 13, there were places the disciples went where the power of the kingdom was truly manifest just as if Jesus was there.

There was repentance proclaimed and it was all backed up with healings and the driving out of demons. But some people were going to miss out on this. This golden opportunity to respond to the gospel because they never wanted anything to do with it in the first place.

They saw the disciples coming from a mile away, shut their gate and their doors and said, no, not interested. In response, the disciples leave.

They shake the dust off their feet. What does that mean? It means just getting rid of the dirt that they had stood on so as not to get to anywhere else they went. Now, I was a student worker here in Edinburgh at Chalmers Church for the last three years before moving up to Burghead and a few times when chatting with students who were interested in the gospel for a while, perhaps even for the first time, after a few meetups and after a few conversations, you'd hear something along the lines of this.

Davi, it's been great to chat to you. Thank you so much. I've really enjoyed it. I've thought about things enough for now and I'm happy where I am at the moment. I don't want to think about it anymore.

[19:02] I'm just going to live my life as it is for the moment. Thanks. Thanks a lot. Which is just a really polite way of saying, stop texting me, stop trying to phone me, stop talking to me about Jesus.

I don't want to hear it. Thank you. Sometimes we know that before the Lord, we have done all that we can do and that our friend does not want to hear anymore and we are grieved as I was and we feel a bit helpless perhaps but we must leave it to the Lord's sovereign wisdom.

There are other places, there are other people who also need to hear the gospel and so we stop trying with them and we move on elsewhere.

Again, like with the parables, like with the miracles, if you don't want it, well, you don't get it. Let's have a think about our third reaction to the gospel.

Some do want to listen but confusion and pride cause a lack of commitment. We come to Herod and it's tough to know what to do with Herod.

[20:24] He's not a straightforward character, is he? He's very interested in what John the Baptist has to say so much so that he puts him in prison to protect him from his wife.

That sounds a bit weird, doesn't it? But it's true. John had been speaking out against the marriage of Herod and Herodias because Herodias was previously married to Philip and Philip was Herod's brother and Herod and Herodias had kind of conspired to end that marriage so that they could get together.

It was really sneaky and horrible and just wrong. Now because John had been speaking out against that, Herodias wanted to kill him but Herod wanted to listen to John.

Why? Well, it seems Herod didn't quite know what to make of John. John seemed to kind of tick some of his spiritual interest boxes but maybe not others.

Have a look at verse 20. I'll read it for us. For Herod feared John knowing that he was a righteous and holy man and he kept him safe.

[21 : 32] When he heard him he was greatly perplexed and yet he heard him gladly. In fact, so confused and so mixed up is the gospel, is John the Baptist, is kind of local superstition in Herod's head that when he hears of Jesus the option that seems most likely to him is that John the Baptist has come back from the dead and maybe he's come to get him.

I don't know, like a zombie or something. This guy is really seriously confused. I have a friend that whenever I do get to see him we always have kind of deep conversations.

We like to talk about that kind of stuff. I remember being in a pub once and explaining to him something of the gospel. I can't remember exactly what it was and his response was something along the lines of yeah, like I totally get it.

It's like when the universe tries to put you on a different path it just feels right, doesn't it? I remember thinking I'm pretty sure that's not what I'm saying.

I'm pretty sure that is not what I'm saying. That's a bit like what Herod is like here. Happy to mix all sorts of spirituality and superstition and ethics and morality together.

[22 : 53] He's kind of confused but he's content in his ignorance and he's too proud to admit that he's wrong. Maybe you can think of someone like this.

Friends that you know, they would listen the way to talk about Jesus and the gospel and what you heard at church on Sunday and they'd be interested they would listen to you but they're not really. They would never admit that they were wrong in their thinking of spiritual things or that you might have the possibility of correcting them but they'd be interested to hear.

They're happy being non-committal to any one perspective. John the Baptist Jesus Mark in his gospel would call that blindness and deafness.

And it's a shame really because they they give you a listening ear. They want to hear but not really. There's something in their hearts that stops them from properly listening.

[24 : 11] That's a possible response to the gospel that Jesus experienced and that John the Baptist experienced. in any case Herod in blissful in his ignorance he doesn't see what's coming.

Herodias gets her chance. This is our fourth reaction to the gospel. Some simply hate the call to repent. It's a big birthday party everyone's had lots to drink.

Herod in front of all his spouse enjoys a kind of this dance performance from this girl. Now that was an acceptable thing to happen will tell you all that you need to know as far as the standard of morality of this place is concerned.

It's horrible. Seedy. Before his guest Herod very happy he offers the girl a really great gift. Now he probably didn't mean literally half his kingdom but it's just a way of saying look I've got lots of power I've got lots of money I'll give you whatever you want just ask I'm kind and I'm powerful and again Herod he's just showing off this is all his pride that's on show and the girl goes to consult with her mother who does not hesitate the head of John the Baptist she says now Herod is conflicted but his pride leads him to make his rejection of John final his true colours are revealed and so John is decapitated and his head is displayed before all the guests Herodias hated what John was saying and instead of ignoring it she harboured a grudge and she did something about it

John's fate is so sad he had been proclaiming what Jesus had been proclaiming that repentance and belief in the gospel would lead to forgiveness salvation and hope for the future had Herodias heard John properly perhaps she would have found joy and forgiveness but instead she hated him and she hated the gospel and she wanted to kill him rather than admit that she was a sinner I remember walking home with a friend once again talking about faith and other things it sounds like I have these chats with my friends all the time I don't these are one-offs so I'm not like super evangelist over here these are just kind of bits and bobs that I've experienced over the years and at one point he stopped me and he pointed his finger at me and he said don't let them tell you you're a

bad person he was quite fiery at this this is unusual for this guy to get quite angry like that that's what offended him the most about the gospel that Jesus would think that he was not a good person that he was a sinner and he got quite angry about that now he didn't go on to try and hurt me we're still good friends but here's someone who would have absolutely no problem with the church not existing or the gospel never being proclaimed and he it's such a shame because

[27 : 56] I was trying to communicate to him that it was despite our sinfulness and our brokenness that Jesus came and that there was real joy and forgiveness to be found but he wouldn't admit that there was a problem in the first place that needed fixed again Mark Jesus would look at that and they would say so blind so deaf so as we come to a close what we're being taught in this passage by Jesus and by Mark is what to expect when we join in with Jesus mission of proclaiming the gospel message to all it's worthwhile expecting this this is real stuff it happens all the time offense skepticism refusal to listen confusion pride and last of all real persecution

John was killed some of our brothers and sisters around the world faced that very danger perhaps we're being we're feeling a bit sobered by this thought or a bit scared perhaps a bit discouraged well if that's you let me just remind you of the big encouragement to take away from this passage let me try to I've said it before but I'll try and give it to us in a different way well Mark the gospel writer he gives us this big flashback to John the Baptist you know it's not in the chronology of the story he's talking about Jesus but why does he give us this big story about what happened to John well I think what Mark is doing is just backing up what Jesus says the experience of legitimate prophets and disciples should be and is have a look at verse 4 this is what Jesus says to the crowds when they reject him

Jesus said to them a prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household prophets are without honor it's not what we'd expect would we legitimate prophets are without honor here's how you can tell what a legitimate prophet looks like rejection and suffering counterintuitive isn't it but it's true that's what Jesus was experiencing that's what Jesus will experience at the cross that's what John the Baptist had experienced it's tragic but it's the reality this is what real prophets experience and the disciples of Jesus then and now I'm talking to us need to know that we need to know that because we will be confronted with rejection of all the different types that we have seen and we need to know and we need to be convinced that this really is the experience of disciples as the kingdom grows this is normal we need to be convinced of that and if we are convinced we are comforted because we are not missing a trick we are not missing out on a means or a strategy for gospel success we are doing what legitimate prophets do and we are experiencing what legitimate prophets experience rejection and persecution

Jesus knows what that is to experience and he is teaching his disciples to expect it so when the offense and the refusal to listen when the confusion when the persecution comes we can't be caught off guard we cannot be caught off guard instead we will lean on our king who is not a fraud because of the rejection he experienced but is the genuine king because of the rejection he experienced that's our king we follow in his footsteps emboldened by his example not deterred by the rejection but confident in it so this morning we heard Jesus knows what his gospel needs go and speak but speaking the gospel is really hard you say well Jesus knows what that's like too he knows what that's like too you're not missing a trick this is what legitimate disciples experience this is how the kingdom grows you are experiencing it and remember we didn't look at it there's chapter 5 there is good soil out there there really is let's pray why don't we take a moment just to meditate and think upon what the Lord has been saying to us this evening heavenly father thank you for your word once more thank you for how real it is how relevant it is to our experience thank you father that you know what it is like to be rejected you know what it is like for your gospel to be rejected father we pray that as we go on from this place tonight on to the rest of this week as we seek to witness for you would you help us to do so would you help us to partake in your plans for your kingdom in this city and in this country would we gladly join in and endure the rejection and the persecution that comes with being your disciple knowing that you are with us you know what it is like and that you will return one day to vindicate and to bring your people home father keep us mindful of these truths this week in Jesus name amen you and there you