

April 6, 2025

THE VARIED RESPONSES TO JESUS

Mark 3:7-35

(5 of 22 in a series through Mark 1-9)

It's clear by this point in Mark's gospel that he wants us to see clearly who Jesus is. Nearly every sermon to this stage in our study has had points that begin with "Jesus" and are followed by a description of who he is or what he does (or has done). Again, I think that's the focus of Mark's gospel. Perhaps that isn't groundbreaking to announce that the gospels are about Jesus, but it is easy for us to get lost in details at times and forget that the focus is constantly to be on Jesus. But as we look at the text we're examining this morning, there is another focus that Mark wants to see and consider—*our response* to Jesus.

I say that because in some ways, each of the sections in our text can feel no connection at all. We have a scene involving the crowds who seem to affirm Jesus' popularity, the calling of the twelve, Jesus' family thinking he's crazy, the scribes continuing to oppose him, and Jesus making a glorious announcement about the state of those who do his will. As I've noted, these sections can feel a bit disjointed and these groups unrelated.

But I think what each of them has in common is that they're revealing a certain response to Jesus. Some look good but aren't quite what's required. Some look bad, and yet there's hope. Others look normal and yet reveal a depth of God's glorious grace. Some are worse than they even appear. And, finally, others show forth news so good it's hard to believe it's actually true.

Therefore, what I want to do this morning is walk through the text by examining the response of each of these groups to Jesus, taking note of how this might be a warning or comfort to us as we too respond to Jesus. And I want to begin with the response of the crowds.

The response of the crowds

In verses 7-12 we see a glimpse of how the crowds are responding to Jesus. Mark mentions the "crowd" repeatedly in these verses, twice telling us that a "great crowd" had formed around Jesus. The text begins with Jesus withdrawing with his disciples to the sea, but the result isn't that he ends up having a good time with his small number of disciples. Rather, we're told that "a great crowd followed" (v. 7). And it wasn't just that the crowd was large (though it was), it was representative of the entire area. In verses 7-8 he mentions people coming from Galilee, Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, from beyond the Jordan, and from around Tyre and Sidon. Now, these names probably mean very little to us unless someone is really knowledgeable with first century middle eastern geography. But if you are, you're recognizing that Mark is noting that every direction people could be coming from, they are. In other words, Jesus' popularity seemingly knows no bounds in how it's growing.

But this puts Jesus in a dangerous position, practically speaking. The reason why is that the crowds weren't coming to sit peacefully in front of him and let him provide them instruction about the kingdom of God and such. According to verses 10, they were coming in order to touch him. Why? Well, they'd heard about all of his healings, perhaps noting that he'd reached out and touched many as he had healed them (as with the leper), and they reasoned that if they could just physically touch Jesus, they would be healed as well. Well, imagine a great crowd of people gathering in one place, and each one of them wants to literally put his hands on you. That's a scary situation. You could be crushed.

Well, Jesus knew this as well, so he tells the disciples to get a boat ready for him so that the crowd wouldn't crush him. The idea seems to be that he could get on the boat, row out to sea a bit, and nobody could physically touch him there. But that distance didn't stop Jesus from having an effect on the crowd because his mere presence caused the demons who'd afflicted some in the crowd to reveal themselves, as they cried out, "You are the Son of God" (v. 11), so Jesus silenced them, as he often does throughout the gospel. They will have no control over how and when Jesus' reveals himself to those following him.

But this raises the question, "Why exactly were the crowds clamoring to get to Jesus?" Notice, it's because they're interested in his miracles. Mark tells us in verse 8 that they came to him because they "heard what he was doing." They wanted to physically touch him because they thought he could bless them. They weren't there to hear him so that they might believe what he said and obey him.

In fact, that's how crowds always function in Mark's gospel. They are mentioned a lot, but never really positively. They are never noted to repent and believe, which is what Jesus demands when he first begins preaching (1:15). They are never brought up and pointed to as some kind of positive measure of Jesus' success. In fact, the most consistent element Mark notes about crowds is that they keep people from getting to Jesus. But, perhaps most damning, we're going to see in chapter 4 that Jesus specifically speaks to them in parables without explaining the meaning, which he provides only for his disciples. And by doing so, he's showing that he sees the crowds as something of "outsiders" to those who truly follow him.¹

What then does the crowd's response to Jesus represent? They literally are a group who want to profit from a connection to Jesus without any kind of commitment to him in repentance and faith. And that response isn't unique to the first century. How many times have we seen individuals who find themselves in great need—perhaps health-wise, or financial, or in a dangerous situation—and they cry out to the Lord to deliver them, and he does. And what is the result? More often than not, they walk away. They're not interested in turning away from their rebellious lifestyle against the Lord, repenting and believing in him. They simply want the blessings of being close to him.

¹ I am dependent on James Edwards for this perceptive view of the crowds in Mark's gospel. See *The Gospel According to Mark*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 74.

We've seen the same thing with politicians, who, at times, want the benefit of identifying with Jesus, and even quoting Scripture, while pushing for policies that are at odds with straightforward commands of Scripture. And Jesus himself tells us that there will be many who will be drawn to the perceived benefits of following him, even confessing him as Lord, only to be like seed in shallow soil that springs up quickly and wilts away just as quickly. The short of the crowd's response is that we need to be careful if we want to draw close to Jesus and even claim to be his follower, while being unwilling to repent, believe, and obey his commands. The response of the crowds serves as a warning to us. Second, we see the response of the apostles.

The response of the apostles

Verses 13-19 tell us of Jesus calling the twelve to follow him. It's not by mistake that Jesus calls twelve specifically. He's showing that just as Israel came from the twelve tribes, so Jesus is forming a people, a new Israel, around himself. And this is why, when Judas betrays the Lord and takes his life, the eleven remaining apostles are insistent that another is raised up to walk alongside them and be the twelfth.

In Mark's gospel, to this point, he's given us some details about the calling of a few of these: Peter, Andrew, James, John, and Matthew. Now, he simply identifies the rest in a group, and most of them are mentioned very little throughout the gospel. But Mark does mention here the purpose for which Jesus called these twelve to him, whom he names "apostles." It is "so that they might be with him, and he might send them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons" (vv. 14-15). The last two notes make sense. Jesus himself has been preaching and casting out demons, and the twelve will do likewise, serving as an extension of Jesus' ministry prior to his death and eventually mimicking his ministry after he ascends back to the Father.

The first note given, however, that they were to be with him might not strike us as important as it is. Sometimes perhaps we read this and are encouraged in our devotional time, remembering how important it is just to spend time before the Lord meditating on the Scripture and praying each day, and that is definitely a good reminder. It is indeed crucial for us to "be with Jesus." But the supreme importance of the twelve apostles being with Jesus is that they were to serve as eyewitnesses of the ministry, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. In fact, after Judas betrays the Lord and the eleven seek to appoint a replacement, they actually require that it is someone who was with Jesus from the beginning, saying, "So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection" (Acts 1:21-22).

So then what does their response to come to Jesus when he calls them show us? Well, we've already noted a few weeks back that it reminds us of the power of Jesus' call, when he summons his sheep to himself. There is a certain call that the Lord issues that creates what it commands. That is, Jesus calls, and our hearts are so arrested by his call that we no longer see him as our enemy but as our glorious and irresistible Savior. But, more importantly in this text, we see why

Jesus calls these to himself. Notice in verse 13, Mark tells us, “And he went up on the mountain and called to him *those whom he desired.*”

This is true of all whom Jesus calls to himself. He calls us because he desires us to follow him. As I mentioned, the twelve are representative of the whole of this new Israel—those whom the Lord gathers to himself. And so as he desired them to be with him and called them, so he does with us.

So, let me encourage you for a second not to go down the path of trying to figure out all the details of sovereignty, responsibility, and the like—though those issues are important, and we’ve spoken to them a lot. But, rather, just stop and enjoy this reality. If you’re a follower of Jesus, it’s because he desired you to be his. Mark gives us the crowds, and then he shows us twelve whom Jesus desired to be his. Do you see what a blessing this is? Don’t be overcome with insecurities in this life and haunted with self-doubt, when you get to live your life knowing that Jesus desired you to be his and made you the object of his grace. Third, we see the response of Jesus’ family.

The response of Jesus’ family

In the next scene, we have the response of Jesus’ family, but it might not be what you expect. Perhaps we anticipate they’re as proud of Jesus as one human can be of another. But, that’s not quite it. Rather, Mark writes, “Then he went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, ‘He is out of his mind’ (vv. 20-21).

Now, this story won’t actually conclude until verse 31, which you see begins, “And his mother and his brothers came.” This is a storytelling technique that Mark uses throughout his gospel that some have labeled “sandwiching.” He starts a story, interrupts it to tell another story, and then gets back to the original story. But before we get to the conclusion of this episode with Jesus’ family, we have enough in verse 21 to see their response to Jesus. They think he’s crazy and is out of his mind.

Now, I don’t think we should read this to think that his family is against him, as enemies. If they were, they’d no doubt let him keep putting himself at risk of being trampled by zealous crowds and make enemies among the scribes and Pharisees. My guess is that they want to save him from these things (and perhaps protect the family’s reputation). In their minds, they see him having gone crazy, and they want to protect him (and them) from the consequences of his behavior. Moreover, they will ultimately believe. We know that Jesus’ brother, James, for example, will become the leader of the Jerusalem church after Jesus’ resurrection.

But let’s pause here and note that this response too is reflected in many in our day. There are numerous people who want to save Jesus from the consequences of what he says and does. There are some who even profess to be followers of Jesus who take all of his teaching that they deem scandalous and will drive people away, and they reject it or at least seek to make it palatable to the unbelieving culture. They might say that Jesus really didn’t condemn the

practice of sexual immorality and homosexual acts, or affirm the goodness of gender. He didn't really mean that marriage is sacred and only for a man and woman, or that men are the head of their homes, or that men and women have specific roles that must be carried out in the home and church. And when he said, "I'm the way, the truth, and the life, no man comes to the Father except by me," he wasn't suggesting that the sincere Buddhist, Hindu, or the like would be thrown into the lake of fire on the day of judgment. Nor did he really mean to teach that hell is eternal torment.

You see, there are all kinds of people who want to rescue Jesus from the implications of what he said and did. We want to go and rescue him before society judges him as undesirable. We want to put forward a culturally desirable Jesus. But Jesus doesn't need us to rescue him just like he didn't need his family to go and seize him. He's not out of his mind. Will he make enemies? Yes. Did they eventually succeed in killing him? Yes. But does that mean that Jesus was wrong in anything he said or did? Not at all. And on that Easter Sunday morning as he walked out of the tomb alive, his vindication was clear. He didn't need rescuing. He's the one who laid down his life and took it up again for us. That's why we must repent, believe, and follow him. In his family, we see a warning about our response being one of trying to help Jesus from the cultural consequences of his teaching and actions. Continuing on, we see the response of the scribes.

The response of the scribes

The response of the scribes in verses 22-30 is quite intense. Luke tells us that a contingent of them came from Jerusalem to where Jesus was with severe attacks, saying, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "by the prince of demons he casts out demons" (v. 22). By saying that he is possessed by Beelzebul, they were simply using another name for Satan. In other words, they were saying that Jesus is drawing his power to cast out demons from the devil himself.

Jesus' response is to show how silly and meaningless such an accusation is. He responds, "How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end. But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house" (vv. 23-27).

Jesus' response shows the illogical nature of their attacks. If indeed he is making an assault on the kingdom of the devil by the power of the devil, then Satan is simply destroying himself. That makes no sense and obviously isn't what is happening. But the conclusion is not to think that Jesus, then, is not launching some assault on the kingdom of Satan. He in fact is. He has come into enemy-occupied territory like one who enters a strong man's house, binds that man, and plunders his goods. This is what Jesus is doing. He's come into the kingdom of this world and is plundering those whom Satan has held enslaved through their condemnation and fear of death. We ourselves are trophies of Jesus' plundering, if indeed our faith is in Christ.

But then Jesus goes on the offensive. That is, he's not merely interested in defending his actions and showing that he does these things by the power of God. Rather, he wants to show the terrible place where these scribes now find themselves. He says in verses 28-29, "Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin," and Mark adds that Jesus said this because "they were saying, 'He has an unclean spirit'" (v. 30).

Now, sadly, many believers have feared that they've committed this eternal or unforgiveable sin, but Jesus certainly didn't say this to afflict those with tender consciences. In fact, the exact opposite is the case. These scribes refused to acknowledge that Jesus is who he had proved himself to be over and over. They were even in that moment ascribing his power to the devil. In other words, they were so committed to refusing and opposing Jesus, that they'd charge him with something illogical rather than acknowledge he is the Lord. That's what Jesus is saying is unforgivable—a heart that rejects the Spirit's testimony of who Jesus is and refuses to believe. That stand toward Jesus won't be forgiven in the end.

Jesus forgives all kinds of sin. That's what he means when he says, "All sins will be forgiven." All kinds of sins will be forgiven. Paul committed blasphemy according to his own testimony and became an apostle. Jesus' family thought he was mad, and James became a leader in the church. All kinds of sins will be forgiven. But don't think that you can harden your heart and refuse to acknowledge Jesus as Lord in this life and find forgiveness on the day of judgment. It won't happen.

And so we're to see the scribes' response to Jesus as a response that we must not imitate. Don't harden your heart in a refusal to acknowledge Jesus is who he says he is. Each moment you refuse to repent and believe, you're playing a dangerous game. Your heart could harden to the point that repentance is impossible. So let today be the day you repent and believe and do not mimic the response of the scribes in this text. Their response, too, is a warning to us. And, finally, we see the response of Jesus' true family.

The response of Jesus' true family

In verses 31-35, we get the end of the story concerning Jesus' mother and brother. In verse 31, they make it to where Jesus is. Remember, they're planning to come and seize Jesus from making a fool of himself because they think he's out of his mind. But when Jesus got word that his mother and brothers were seeking him, he answered, "'Who are my mother and my brothers?' And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother'" (vv. 33-35).

Now, certainly Jesus wasn't saying that everyone in the crowd at that precise moment believed. Again, in the very next chapter, he'll show them to be outsiders to his disciples to whom he explains his parables. But they represent something before Jesus. Any of them who obeys him,

repenting, believing, and following his commands, Jesus considers his true family. That's how Jesus sees us if indeed we belong to him. We're his family. And we are treasured by him.

If you're a follower of Christ, it's not just that he desires you and made you an object of his grace. He thinks of you as his family. Is there anything more glorious in the world than that? But many claim to be his followers, who refuse to obey his commands. Let our response to him be a willing obedience and a willingness to repent of our sin. Let that response be ours now as we come to the table. Amen.