

Four Responses to Jesus

Mark 3:7-35 ⁷ But Jesus withdrew with His disciples to the sea. And a great multitude from Galilee followed Him, and from Judea ⁸ and Jerusalem and Idumea and beyond the Jordan; and those from Tyre and Sidon, a great multitude, when they heard how many things He was doing, came to Him. ⁹ So He told His disciples that a small boat should be kept ready for Him because of the multitude, lest they should crush Him. ¹⁰ For He healed many, so that as many as had afflictions pressed about Him to touch Him. ¹¹ And the unclean spirits, whenever they saw Him, fell down before Him and cried out, saying, "You are the Son of God." ¹² But He sternly warned them that they should not make Him known.

¹³ And He went up on the mountain and called to Him those He Himself wanted. And they came to Him. ¹⁴ Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach, ¹⁵ and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons: ¹⁶ Simon, to whom He gave the name Peter; ¹⁷ James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James, to whom He gave the name Boanerges, that is, "Sons of Thunder"; ¹⁸ Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Cananite; ¹⁹ and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him. And they went into a house.

²⁰ Then the multitude came together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread. ²¹ But when His own people heard about this, they went out to lay hold of Him, for they said, "He is out of His mind."

²² And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, "He has Beelzebub," and, "By the ruler of the demons He casts out demons." ²³ So He called them to Himself and said to them in parables: "How can Satan cast out Satan? ²⁴ "If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵ "And if a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. ²⁶ "And if Satan has risen up against himself, and is divided, he cannot stand, but has an end. ²⁷ "No one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. And then he will plunder his house. ²⁸ "Assuredly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they may utter; ²⁹ "but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation" -- ³⁰ because they said, "He has an unclean spirit."

³¹ Then His brothers and His mother came, and standing outside they sent to Him, calling Him. ³² And a multitude was sitting around Him; and they said to Him, "Look, Your mother and Your brothers are outside seeking You." ³³ But He answered them, saying, "Who is My mother, or My brothers?" ³⁴ And He looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him, and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers! ³⁵ "For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother."

Whatever has become an important word for this generation. When someone says 'whatever' they mean, 'who cares', 'I couldn't be bothered to talk about this', 'this is not even worth a response.' 'Whatever' says I am indifferent, I don't care. In some ways, it has become a kind of motto for many people. Faced with the problems of injustice, bad government, ecological disaster, wars, crime, they respond with 'whatever'.

But there is one word which even the whatever generation hesitates to say 'whatever' to. The word Jesus. Jesus is not a name that people remain neutral over. Jesus is a conversation starter or a conversation stopper. Jesus starts arguments and heated debates. People might say 'whatever' about a dead politician, or a retired sports-star, or a Hollywood actor, or some figure from history. But almost no one shrugs and says 'whatever' about Jesus. The nature and claims of Jesus insist upon a response.

That is exactly how Jesus wanted it when He lived and ministered in Israel. Jesus pressed people for a response about Him. He did not leave people to just enjoy His healings, or be amused by His miracles. He demanded that people decide about Him. Jesus was like a sharp mountain peak – the rain either falls on one side or the other. Reject Him or receive Him, no one said 'whatever' about Jesus.

This larger section of Mark is rather like a summary of what people decided about Jesus. Although

we are only in chapter 3, Mark has summarized one-and-a-half years of ministry in these chapters. Chapter 3 is rather like the results of those 18 months summarized. Here are the major responses to Jesus. What shall we do with Jesus? We can't shrug and say 'whatever', so what shall we decide about Jesus? In this account, we will find four responses to Jesus. And we will also find that these four responses to Jesus are still responses people have to Jesus. They are responses contemporary people have to Jesus. And from these four, perhaps you will find yourself. More importantly, I hope you will select the right response to Jesus Christ.

I. Some Try to Use Him (vv 6-12, 20)

Jesus was nothing less than a folk-hero to the general population. He was the kind of man that you tell stories about around the fire, that you tell your children about, and the tales become larger than life. Soon, He was a living legend, a phenomenon that everyone in Israel wanted to see for themselves. People were fascinated with him. So widespread was this fascination, that Mark tells us in verses 7 and 8 where the people came from to see Him: Tyre and Sidon were to the far north, parallel to Syria. Idumea was to the far south, south of Jerusalem. Galilee was the northern province, Judea was the southern province. Mark is really naming the points of the compass. North to south, east to west, people were coming to Jesus.

And how many were coming?

Verse 7: "a great multitude"

Verse 9 tells us that Jesus was in danger of being mobbed. ⁹ So He told His disciples that a small boat should be kept ready for Him because of the multitude, lest they should crush Him.

Verse 20 tells us that so many were coming that every minute of the day was taken up. No time was left over to eat. If newspapers had existed then, they would have had the headline: "Jesus-Fever."

Jesus was wildly popular, but why was He wildly popular? Our text tells us why they came to Him:

⁸ and Jerusalem and Idumea and beyond the Jordan; and those from Tyre and Sidon, a great multitude, **when they heard how many things He was doing, came to Him**

¹⁰ **For He healed many, so that as many as had afflictions pressed about Him to touch Him.**

Why did the people come to Jesus? They came to be healed. They came to have demons cast out. And they came to hear teaching which was like rain in the desert compared to what they had been hearing in the synagogue. They came because here was the most likely man in living memory to overthrow Roman rule, remove that onerous tax burden, and give Israel back her pride as a nation - ruled only by Yahweh.

So people loved the Jesus-phenomenon: miracle-worker, Pharisee-humiliator, food-maker, healer, and likely King. But they loved Him only as a tool for their own ends. They wanted to use Jesus, not be used by Jesus. They wanted Jesus to serve them, not serve Him. They wanted Jesus to change their circumstances, not demand that they change their lives.

And underneath the soft top-soil of accepting Jesus, there was a rock-hard layer of rejecting Jesus. When Jesus refused to make food for them but told them to eat Him, and trust in Him, they walked away from him. When He confronted their superficial praise by telling them to forsake all, leave family, not look back, and take up a cross, people skulked back to their old lives. When he told them to break with Pharisaic Judaism and become part of His flock, they backed away from Him.

John tells us how Jesus responded to this fickle kind of belief in Him.

John 2:23-25 ²³ Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. ²⁴ But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men, ²⁵ and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man.

The word for believe in verse 23 and the word for commit in verse 24 are the same word in the original. Literally, people believed in Jesus, but He did not believe in them. People superficially trusted Jesus, but Jesus did not entrust Himself to them. People claimed to be committed to Jesus, but Jesus did not commit to them. Why? Because He knew what was in man.

When people tried to use Jesus, He did not encourage that attitude or give them any false hopes. He would throw down the hardest challenges; the most extreme statements of commitment, to expose their selfish agendas. He pulled off the covers of their self-centred lives, and forced them to choose: you either take all of Me, with the privileges and the responsibilities, the rewards and the cost, or you do not take Me at all.

That's still His message today to the person who wants to use Him. The man who thinks that Jesus is a ladder to climb higher in the business world; or the woman who thinks Jesus is an anti-depression pill; or the politician who thinks Jesus' name is a vote-magnet; or the sluggard who thinks Jesus name is a lottery ticket; the hardened sinner who thinks Jesus is an insurance policy against hell - these all do not seek Jesus for Himself. They seek Him for what they can get from Him.

To these people, Jesus still does not entrust Himself. To these, Jesus still says, I cannot be your Saviour without being your Lord. I cannot be your life unless you also die with me. I cannot be all things to you, unless you are entirely mine.

Some people in Christ's time tried to use Him for their own benefits.

II. Some Try to Domesticate Him (vv 21, 31-32)

Mark 3:20-21 ²⁰ Then the multitude came together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread. ²¹ But when His own people heard about this, they went out to lay hold of Him, for they said, "He is out of His mind."

The words "His own people" do not refer to the Jewish people in general; they refer to Christ's own physical family. His mother, Mary, and his half-brothers and sisters. We know this, because they come up again a few verses later.

³¹ Then His brothers and His mother came, and standing outside they sent to Him, calling Him.

Very sadly, what did His own family suggest about His ministry? What did they say about Him in verse 21? "He is out of His mind. He is delirious. He is gone off on a wild, selfish crusade. He has lost touch with reality. He should be at home, carrying on the family business of carpentry, and here He is, doing so much teaching, that He and His friends don't even have time to eat.

And like well-meaning family, they want to lay hold of Him. They want to bring Him home, give him a nice hot meal, help him to see things clearly again, and hope that soon these visions of saving the world will evaporate, and He'll be back to normal.

This is what unbelieving family does when someone converts to Christianity, and this is what

Christ's family did to Him - well-meaning, but patronizing. Instead of listening to Him, instead of believing in Him, instead of submitting to Him, they dismiss His as being on a crazy crusade, and they tell Him to come home with them and get back to normal.

Dismissing Jesus. Just wave away all His claims to being God. Just pretend all those miracles don't make a difference. Just ignore all the prophecies He fulfilled. Let's just make him into wise Jesus of Nazareth. Let's stop with all this God-man stuff and bring him home to everyday Nazareth.

How did Jesus respond to His family's attempt to domesticate Him? He didn't seem to respond at all, when they tried to laid hold of Him. When people tell Jesus that His family is looking for Him, how does He respond?

³³ But He answered them, saying, "Who is My mother, or My brothers?" ³⁴ And He looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him, and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers! ³⁵ "For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother."

In other words, truer than my physical family is my spiritual family. At this time, my physical family is dismissing my claims, trying to domesticate me. My true family are those submitted to the Father.

He ignores the attempts to domesticate Him. Proverbs 26 tells us not to answer a fool according to his folly, lest we become like him, so Jesus was not going to enter into conversation with those who tried to dismiss Him.

So it is today. When people try to domesticate Jesus, and turn Him into a wise teacher, whose legend has been overblown, or a good rabbi, who never intended anyone to worship Him, or a brilliant teacher, who become mythically worshipped, there is no answering voice from heaven. Jesus ignores these. When some scholars try to say that the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith are two different people, they are really doing what Jesus' family did – trying to domesticate Jesus. And when your colleague, family member, friend says that Jesus was a great man, but not God, he or she is trying to domesticate Jesus. Because Jesus never left any doubt as to who He thought He was. He called Himself the Son of God, said He was one with the Father, said He had come from heaven, said He was returning there, said He was coming to die for the world's sins, and accepted faith in Himself and worship of His person. When you try to domesticate those claims, you must end up calling Him a liar. Jesus has no response to that.

You either deal with Him as He introduced Himself, or you don't. Jesus won't interact with your phantom Jesus, your puppet Jesus, your pretend Jesus.

Nice people try to domesticate Jesus. Sadly, the world also contains not-so-nice people. Not so nice people do not try to domesticate Jesus.

III. Some Try to Discredit Him (vv 22-30)

From verses 22-30, we have a real turning point in Jesus' ministry. The scribes from Jerusalem, representing the religious establishment make a judgement about Jesus. They have seen sign after sign, miracle after miracle, and heard His teaching. And since His teaching stands in contrast to this, and since they are certain they are on the right side of God's favour, there must be an explanation for all these miracles and signs that Jesus does.

Here is their explanation: He gets His power from Satan. Beelzebub, which was a Jewish term for

the king of the demons, or Satan, energizes Jesus. The Spirit that controls Jesus, the Spirit that fills Him, and then provides the power for these miracles is not the Holy Spirit. It is that most wicked of spirits, Satan Himself.

What are they doing? They are trying to discredit Him. They are attempting to smear His name, take away any trust people might have in Him, by saying He is actually evil. No point in worshipping an evil man. No point in trusting an evil man.

You see this in the run-up to elections. What do political parties try to do to one another. They try to discredit their opposition. Look at this man's record. Look at his failures in this area. Look at the promises this party did not keep. Look at the track record. And, around the time of elections, someone will try to find some kind of moral scandal, some extra-marital affair, some shady business deals, some hushed-up bribery, and bring it out – to discredit the opponent. Don't vote for him, he's not worthy.

The scribes are doing just that. Don't trust Jesus, He's actually working for Satan. Don't worship Jesus, He's actually part of the demonic kingdom. He's working for the enemy.

How does Jesus respond to attempts to discredit Him? As He did here, He would answer, and then warn.

He answered their challenge. He showed that the mud they were throwing was ridiculous, and self-contradictory. Satan can't cast out Satan. And then he warned them that they were blaspheming the Holy Spirit, which is the unpardonable sin. The severest penalty is coming to them.

Are there modern-day discreditors of Jesus? Yes, by the thousands. They are the ones who unashamedly call Jesus mad, egotistical or a fool who got Himself crucified. They give him motives of self-seeking, or some kind of psychological condition where He believed His own claims. Some say He was a very shrewd illusionist, a master of sleight of hand, able to wow and trick those poor primitive townfolk of rural Israel. Some modern Jews say He hid the name of God in His arm, and used it to do miracles.

But it all says the same thing: don't trust Jesus, He's not who you think He is. He's a magician. He's delusional. He's an eccentric visionary who couldn't stop His own death. He's a deceiver. Jesus answers these with the four gospels = the plain eye-witness accounts of His life, death, and resurrection. And He warns them too:

Matthew 12:36-37 ³⁶ "But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. ³⁷ "For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

Three negative, unbelieving ways of responding to Jesus: trying to use Him, trying to domesticate Him, trying to discredit Him. Gladly, a fourth group existed in Israel. They were in the minority, as they are now, but they were there.

IV. Some Seek to Follow Him (vv 13-19, 33-35)

¹³ And He went up on the mountain and called to Him those He Himself wanted. And they came to Him. ¹⁴ Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach, ¹⁵ and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons:

In Jesus ministry, He extended three calls. He called all the people to acknowledge Him as Messiah

and Lord. That was the first call. He called some people to come and assist Him in His ministry financially, logistically, practically. It would mean leaving their professions to do so, and He didn't ask or expect everyone to do that. This was the second call. Out of those, He called twelve men to be His unique representatives, to go with His authority, receive special revelation and special miracle-working power. This was the third call, and it was His call of the apostles. Here they are listed out for us, the twelve, always in three groups of four: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew and Thomas, James of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot (or Canaanite), Thaddeus, and Judas Iscariot. Peter always first, Judas, always last. From the start, Jesus knew that Judas would betray him, but chose him nonetheless – partly to extend mercy to him, partly to fulfil his part in the final week of Christ's life.

The key is - where did these apostles come from? They came from a group of people, who were already following Jesus. This event is at least a year and a half into His three-year ministry. He is selecting from many people who have been following Him.

Out of the great mass of superficial followers, of patronising domesticators, and of malicious discreditors, there were some people, who at least outwardly followed Jesus. They had gotten past what Jesus could do for them, and had believed in His person. They believed He was the Messiah, and that He called for repentance and faith in Him. Some of them had left all to follow Him. Some of them had given up entire lifestyles to follow Him, as in the case of Matthew. Some of them had given up political careers, in the case of Simon the Zealot. These ones were following Christ.

In fact, the very next chapter of Mark, begins Christ's parables, where He explains through stories, this phenomenon. Why do the seeds of Christ's message not cause everyone to come to Him? Well, some hearts are hard, some are superficially open, but hard below, some are choked, and some are ready. Some, whom God's Spirit has prepared, here Christ's message, and they do not feel that they need to discredit Him. They do not feel that they need to explain Him away. They do not see in Jesus a stepping stone to personal advancement, a ladder to health or wealth, or a better life. They are drawn to Christ Himself. They hear the call of the Shepherd.

They see, for the first time, their own sinfulness, and the love of a Creator who relentlessly pursues us. They see Christ as beautiful, and they come. They come to receive His gift of life and forgiveness, yes, but they also come for Him – to receive Him, to begin a new life in Him.

Matthew 16:13-17 ¹³ When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" ¹⁴ So they said, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." ¹⁵ He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷ Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.

How does Jesus respond to these ones?

³³ But He answered them, saying, "Who is My mother, or My brothers?" ³⁴ And He looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him, and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers!" ³⁵ "For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother."

He calls them family. He loves them. He regards them as kin. Because they are!

John 1:12 ¹² But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:

Everyone who comes to Christ to receive Him – all of Him – will never find a cold reception by Him. The one who comes to Jesus for all Jesus is – Lord, Saviour, Prophet, Priest, King – this one finds that Jesus welcomes you, and blesses you with every spiritual blessing, and becomes the Amen to every one of God's promises to you.

Israel's response to Jesus is really like a cross-section of all humanity's response to Him. Israel put the human heart on display. Mark 3 could have been written in 2012. Most still want Jesus to orbit around them, and meet their needs. Some still want to pat Him on the head and demote Him to a misunderstood, good man. Some still want to poison the very name of Jesus. But here and there, among the herd drinking at the world's waters, one pops up his head. He hears something. She hears something. A voice - it is Christ. He says – you, yes you, come and follow me. Come to Me. Give up your life as you have lived it. Surrender ownership of your life, Turn away from your selfish sinfulness, and come to Me.

Those that hear it, leave the broken cisterns of the world, and turn and come to Him, the fountain of living water.

What say you of Christ? Have you decided? You cannot be neutral about Jesus. You cannot say *whatever* about Jesus. Don't dismiss Him. Don't try to manipulate Him. Don't try to undermine Him. Come to Him for life, and follow Him.