

Receiving and Responding to Jesus

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[0 : 00] Now, I chose Mark chapter six to preach from tonight primarily because, you know, I don't know that I'll ever get to preach at St. Columbus again.

And this is, I suppose if there's one thing that I really wanted to say, this would be the time to say it. And the one thing that I really want to say is that you can put all of your weight on Jesus and he'll be there for you.

He won't let you down. And that's really what this text is all about. It's about believing in Jesus and actually the robustness, the richness of that phrase, of that idea.

Now, you know, there's a mosque just down the street. I'm sure you know that. And I pass it on the bus and as I'm walking often and they have signs out on their fence outside the door.

And one of the signs that they've, I think recently put up says, did you know Muslims believe in Jesus too? That raises the question, what do we mean as Christians when we say, I believe in Jesus?

[1 : 19] I believe that Jesus was a real person. I believe that Jesus was a good teacher, that Jesus was wise, that Jesus did miracles.

I believe that he rose from the dead. What do we mean? Muslims believe that Jesus was a prophet and a good teacher and they believe he did mighty works and miracles.

And as Christians, we have to come to the Bible, God's word, his self-revelation to us where he makes himself known to us and we have to take him for who he says he is, God Almighty, Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, the savior of sinners.

Savior of sinners because he died to pay the price for all the evil we've done. He did it on our behalf so that we who put our weight down on him, who believe in him, could live forever with him, perfect joy, perfect peace when he comes back to redeem creation and rule and reign as king forever.

It's faith, but sometimes we take that word faith, it's just so common, isn't it? And we kind of use it flippantly. We say, I believe in Jesus and we mean something really vague and abstract, kind of like saying, I go to church.

[2 : 39] But what kind of belief in Jesus do we need to be saved from our sins? That's what we're really after, isn't it?

Now Mark's little story about Jesus in his hometown teaches us something important about faith and it lays out for us two potential responses to this Jesus.

One response is to close the door, to close the door on him. Close the door to eternal life and joy. And the other response, of course, is to open wide that door and take Jesus as he really is, all of his glory and all of his power.

So I'm going to go back through Mark chapter 6 verses 1 to 6 and just kind of make a few comments as we go to set the stage. So Mark 6 starting in verse 1, he went away from there and came to his hometown.

[3 : 40] He was in a town on the Sea of Galilee and he raised a girl back from the dead. That's what there is. So he's just come from doing a mighty work.

And now he's gone to Nazareth. This is where he was brought up. Jesus was a little boy here. He was a teenager here. Sorry, you can just leave that up there. I'm going to keep going through it. So he came to his hometown and his disciples followed him. And on the Sabbath, he began to teach in the synagogue. Okay, so he's not only in his hometown. He's with the people who would have grown up with him and helped raise him.

But he's also in the synagogue. He's in the center of worship and he's there on a Sabbath this holy day. So he's with the most religious people who are most familiar with him.

Jesus was probably speaking to the people that taught him in Sunday school class and you know, were his leaders at free church camp. And many who heard him, his Sunday school teachers, etc., they were astonished saying, where did this man get these things?

[4 : 51] What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands? Isn't this the carpenter? Is this the son of Mary, the brother of James and Joseph and Judas and Simon?

Aren't his sisters here with us? They took offense at him. That word there is stumbling block. And Jesus said to them, the prophet's not without honor, except in his hometown, among his relatives and in his own household.

In other words, familiarity breeds contempt. Now comes the really crazy part. And he could do no mighty works there.

Except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. And he marveled. That's a word for sad wonder, astonishment.

[5 : 49] He marveled because of their unbelief. And he went about among the village's teaching. If they wouldn't have him, the very place where God was supposed to be listened to and worshiped, if they wouldn't have him, he'd go somewhere else.

That's sobering. So let's look at this text together and we'll look at Mark 3 at the end of the message as well. Three sections, the danger of astonishing Jesus, the fertile soil of belief, and the surprising family of Jesus.

So number one, the danger of astonishing Jesus. Now, obviously the answer is in the text, but what makes Jesus marvel is a really fascinating question.

Because, well, here's what it doesn't say. I'm often helped in reading the Bible by thinking about what's not there as much as what's there. Notice it, Mark doesn't say that Jesus marveled at their sin.

I mean, we all like to keep up a nice facade, right? Keeping up appearances. We all have this inner self that we'd rather not let other people catch a glimpse of. And we think, well, if you saw me for who I really am, you probably wouldn't like me so much.

[7 : 07] I might lose face. I might not be welcome here or there. But Jesus knows what we're really like way deep down.

He knows our sins, our weaknesses, our failures. That thing that you hate the most about yourself or that thing that you're absolutely the most ashamed of, that does not astonish Jesus.

Jesus doesn't encounter our sin and marvel. And Mark does not say that Jesus marveled at their powerlessness.

We like to be self-sufficient. We like to help ourselves. And we admire people who can help themselves, right? People who climb to the top from humble beginnings. We think that's a good story.

But when it comes to righteousness and sin, when it comes to following God, to obeying God, we are powerless in and of ourselves.

[8 : 07] We've all sinned in word, thought, and deed by what we've done, even by what we've left undone. And our best efforts at undoing that damage is like Lady Macbeth scrubbing at that blood stain.

It won't come out. But Jesus does not look at us and marvel at our inability to help ourselves. Our powerlessness doesn't astonish Jesus.

I mean, you know, in Mark 5, right before this, he raised a girl to life from death. And what is more powerless than death? He's not shocked by our weakness.

In fact, he's tenderly moved by it. Your weakness is what motivates Jesus' tender love and mercy. Jesus strong and kind. So what does astonish Jesus? What's in the text? We marvel because of their unbelief.

[9 : 13] Unbelief. They said, where do you get these things? Where do you get this wisdom? How do you do these mighty works? Did they believe in Jesus?

Well, they believe that he exists, right? And I mean, what a low bar we've set for faith, right, that we just want people to acknowledge that Jesus was a historical person.

That's not faith. They believe that he exists, and Jesus marveled at their unbelief. They believe that Jesus had wisdom, right? They knew he had something important to teach them about God.

They said, what is the wisdom given to him? So they said, yeah, Jesus is a good teacher. He's spiritually wise. They believed that Jesus performed miracles.

Maybe they heard about that girl that he raised from the dead or about the woman who'd been healed from years of bleeding by just touching his robe or any of the other incredible works he'd done.

[10:08] And they didn't say, you know, I doubt those stories are even true. They had no problem actually saying, he's does mighty works. And still, Jesus was filled with sad wonder at their unbelief.

And in the end, he went away. He left the synagogue, went out to other villages to teach about the inbreaking of the kingdom of heaven.

There is great danger in this kind of unbelief in Jesus because he might just give us what we're asking for.

Now, when I hear this kind of message, I tend to think, yeah, there are some, I know some people with that kind of unbelief who, you know, they say they believe in Jesus, but they don't clearly believe in the real Jesus.

And I wish this person could hear that message. Let me just ask you what I had to ask myself earlier this week. Would you ask the question of yourself, say, am I astonishing Jesus with my unbelief?

[11:13] Do I have a little corner of my heart that's holding out and saying no thank you to Jesus?

After all, these people who are saying no thank you, who are filled with unbelief, they're not strangers, right? These aren't like Roman invaders. They're churchgoers who know about Jesus. They're religious. They grew up with him. They're familiar. Yet, even among us, you know, if we've been raised in church all our lives, there's this danger, maybe especially among us.

There's a danger of astonishing Jesus. So that takes us to point number two, the fertile soil of belief. That was unbelief.

Let's talk about belief. Some years back, two well-known preachers in the States, John Piper and Arcee Sproul, they were speaking at a conference. And Arcee Sproul spoke first, and he was speaking about the nature of faith, and he used this kind of well-known illustration.

[12:17] Some of you may have heard it. He said something like, you know, faith is like sitting down on a chair. You can't just look at the chair and say, I think that'll hold me up. You have to sit down and put your weight in it.

Perhaps that chair will hold you up. John Piper was the next speaker, and he came up and said, Arcee Sproul was right. Faith is like sitting on a chair, but he missed out on something.

You have to love the chair. And later at a luncheon for the conference speakers, you know, all the speakers are eating together and chatting about their talks.

Paul leaned over to Piper with a smile and said, John, I love the chair. Sounds a bit silly, but it's true. The kind of unbelief that Mark is talking about is people saying, oh, that chair?

Sure, it's a chair. You can sit on it. But real faith sits in the chair, loves the chair, put all your weight down.

[13:20] That metaphor really pushes it, the balance of reality, doesn't it? You know what I mean. You put our weight down on Jesus. Preaching to those hardened with unbelief like this is like sowing seed on shallow, rocky soil.

Jesus told that parable elsewhere in Mark. But faith, real belief in the real Jesus, is the fertile soil in which the garden of the gospel can take root and just flourish and grow.

So what's the difference between the sign on the mosque, we believe in Jesus too, and biblical faith? What's the difference between believing in Jesus' wisdom and power like the people in his hometown and saving faith?

Faith doesn't just believe that Jesus is. Faith believes that Jesus is for you. Faith doesn't just do the right religious things.

Faith follows Jesus, the object of our faith, actively. Faith doesn't just acknowledge that Jesus has wisdom.

[14:26] Faith cries, I have nowhere else to go. No other source of wisdom in life.

Faith doesn't just say to Jesus, you are powerful. Faith says, I'm powerless and I need you. Faith doesn't just know about Jesus.

Faith wants Jesus. Do you know about Jesus or do you want Jesus? Unbelief treats Jesus like a news commentator on the BBC or something.

You might be watching the news and someone's giving their opinion and you think, yes, that's exactly right. Precisely. Or you think, no, I don't know if he's quite got the right information there.

Belief treats Jesus not like that, but like a prophet. A prophet who says, we can go to him and say, show me God's holiness and show me my sin and help me turn from sin to God and live.

[15:32] Are we open to those sort of prophetic, fresh encounters with Jesus? That's not just something for new converts when they decide to come to Jesus for the first time.

That's something for all of us, no matter how many days, months, years, decades we've been following Jesus. Are we open to the prophetic ministry of Jesus?

Jesus that can wound and heal with a word. Belief wants Jesus to meet our status quo. It's a blessing to our life. No feathers ruffled, please.

But faith says, Lord, I'm bleeding. I'm dying. I need help. I need life. Where else could I go but to Jesus, the author of life?

Biblical faith is not just Jesus aware. It's Jesus oriented. And ultimately, unbelief says to Jesus, yeah, I know who you are, but I'm not really interested.

[16:36] So please don't come and mess up my life. I've got a good thing going here. Maybe this text is a wake up call.

Why are we surprised when we turn Jesus away at the door? We've all done it. We turn Jesus away. We say, no, thank you, not today. And then we find out that he's doing no mighty works in our lives, in our homes, in our churches.

You know, if you read the Gospels, all four Gospels, these marvelous accounts of Jesus' life, the norm everywhere Jesus goes, the norm is that when he encounters faith, it's like heaven cracks open and the kingdom of heaven begins in breaking into our reality.

Mighty works happen. People turn from death to life because Jesus is there and they want him.

And he doesn't look for the really, really strong in faith, right? It's not like, oh, if I had a better faith, Jesus would do mighty works in my heart, the nearest faith, just the nearest.

[17:54] And Jesus says, let's go. We just go to God and hang on. That's all he wants. The Westminster Confession of Faith says this. He says, the principal acts of saving faith are accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life by virtue of the covenant of grace.

Being, receiving, and resting upon Christ, Christ alone. That's it. It's faith.

If you want to see the mighty works of God, you can't just know about Jesus. You have to want him. Do you want him? Do you accept him? Receive him? Do you rest on him alone?

Point number three, the surprising family of Jesus. Let's look back at Mark chapter three for a moment, verse 32 through 35. So remember, Jesus is sitting maybe in a house and there's a crowd of people around him and then some people come up and say, hey, your mother and your brother are outside and they're looking for you.

[19:11] 33, and he answered them, who are my mother and my brothers? That's a weird question. 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. So in Mark 6, what we had just looked at, Jesus goes back to his hometown, right, and even hints that his own family doesn't accept him, right?

God doesn't have honor with his relatives and in his household. And here, just a few chapters earlier, Jesus explains who his real family is.

Verse 34, chapter three, looking at those who sat around him. Jesus's blood relatives were outside. But this crowd of people getting right up close to Jesus, those are the people that wanted to hear him. Those are the people that wanted to be near him. And Jesus looked them in the eye and said, you are my family.

[20:16] The ones who get near to Jesus. He goes on, verse 35, whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.

So extrapolate from that. What is the will of God? It's getting near to Jesus. That's what God wants from you. This morning we looked from 1 Thessalonians 4 and Paul says the will of God, your sanctification, that's the same thing.

Growing in holiness is getting near to Jesus. That's what it's all about. Being receptive and responsive to Jesus, wanting Jesus, it's the will of God.

It's faith. So we want the mighty works of God in our lives, in our homes. We want to see sick healed. We want to see sins forgiven, sinners saved and baptized.

We want to see the dead raised to life. We want to see repentance. We want the mighty works of God, but do we want Jesus? Do we want the prophetic ministry of Jesus?

[21 : 31] The Jesus who can wound and heal with a stroke. The Jesus whose teaching in Mark 1.15 was summed up as repent and believe for the kingdom of God is at hand.

I mean we want a Jesus whose ministry says believe, but not a Jesus whose ministry says repent and believe, let's be honest. But if we won't accept the Jesus who calls us to repentance, then we can't accept the mighty works of God.

If we'll receive the real Jesus, we need to hear his gentle and firm words together. Maybe he's whispering one thing to you tonight.

Won't you turn from the sins and the secrets and have the real Jesus in all his power and glory? Will you open that door? I'm not talking about becoming a Christian for the first time.

I'm talking about taking the next step with Jesus. Unbelief is Jesus. And Jesus is telling him, no thank you.

[22 : 39] We're not interested. And who is the most at danger of that kind of unbelief? I am. We are.

Seriously. It's the church. We're most at risk for that kind of unbelief. We've walked with Jesus a long time. We come to a certain point, familiarity breeds contempt, and we say, actually, I'm good. Please don't mess up what I've got going on. Did you notice, though, in conclusion, did you notice that Jesus does some mighty works?

Mark says he could do no mighty works, but he did some mighty works. Jesus healed. Right? He healed.

Except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. Word literally means the powerless, the sick people. They're the powerless people.

[23 : 38] You're sick. Okay, make yourself better. Sick people are powerless people, right? The sick people are the ones who know, I can't help myself.

I can't do this on my own. Sick people, really sick people. They've tried everything. I've known some people with some very dire diseases that would scoff at certain types of medicine or maybe kind of homeopathic medicine, and the minute things get really dire, they're willing to try anything.

Sick people are willing to try anything. They're desperate, and they go to Jesus and say, I need you. I need Jesus. That's it. So if you're like that, if you know that you're powerless, that you can't fix yourself, there is tremendous hope, radiant hope for you.

Of course, being weak, being powerless won't save you in and of itself, but being powerless and wanting Jesus, that's saving faith.

I don't care if you've never called yourself a Christian or if you've called yourself a Christian for a decade or 50 years or 100 years, will you continue or will you for the first time, except Jesus?

[25 : 00] Will you receive Jesus? Will you rest on Jesus alone? And if you're here and you're new to Christianity, if you're watching online and you're new to Christianity, let me encourage you please read the four Gospels, get them on audiobook.

It's a great way to be read too, and you can read them rather quickly in that way. Take the Gospel and Mark. It's not that long. Take it in a single chunk.

And notice, in his whole ministry, Jesus never turned away. The sick and the powerless, the weak, the sinful.

He never is astonished by our sinfulness. He's never shocked by our secrets, by the skeletons in our closets, by the little corners in our heart full of cobwebs that we don't want to let anyone into. In fact, it's those places of deepest need that compel his mercy and his love and his power.

[26 : 06] How could we turn away from a person like that? Let me close with what we started with, words from Matthew 11.

Jesus said, Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you, learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Let me pray. Jesus, we are glad to find rest in your arms.

We are glad to just stop trying to make it on our own by ourselves, stop trying to look impressive, even to impress ourselves, and just to lean back on you, to put all our weight on you, or you've never let anyone down who's trusted you.

[27 : 17] You are strong. I praise you for that. Amen.