Reactions to Jesus

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[0:00] I would like us to turn back this morning for a little while to Mark's Gospel chapter 3 and carry on this whistle-stop tour, as it were, of Mark's Gospel.

We know that that's one of the ways that Mark chose to write. He chose to move quickly from one scene to another to pack this short Gospel with lots of information about Jesus so that we can know who he is and make a decision, and not only make a decision but continue in our understanding and grow in our understanding of him.
And again, we're looking today at particularly the authority of Jesus and how Mark is unfolding the authority of Jesus to the readers that would first have been given his Gospel and also through the Holy Spirit to ourselves.
And really, I'm linking authority with who we regard as important in our lives, who we listen to, who we respond to, who is Lord of our lives. It's always good to start with an old quote, and I'm sure most of you will have heard of this quote.
It's a very famous quote, it's a quote from C.S. Lewis from Mayor Christianity, and you'll have heard it before, but it's very germane to this passage.
[1:21] I sometimes wonder if C.S. Lewis was reading this chapter when he wrote this quote. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher.

He would either be a lunatic on the level of a man who says he's a poached egg, or else he would be the devil of hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was and is the son of God, or else a madman, or something worse.
You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon, or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about this man being a great human teacher.
He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. And that's very much what this chapter reminds us of, that Mark is revealing to us a Christ who doesn't allow us to just shove him into the corner of our lives and make him insignificant.
And I want to talk and think about a little bit today about the authority of Jesus, about the authority of Jesus Christ and Christ crucified in our lives.
[2:41] His person and the authority that comes from his work, his work on the cross, his crucifixion and resurrection. It's interesting, when we think about it, just take a moment to think about who has authority in our lives, who is the people, what is the thinking that governs our lives.

I think for most people the battle is with just ourselves. Well, this is what I think, is my opinion, and that's what I'm going to live by, come hell or high water. That's how I live by my own opinion.
Or sometimes it's societies, and we're increasingly becoming embraced by this marvelous society who wants to become our moral guardians, who wants us to tell us, who wants to throw the Bible in and give us a whole new morality and govern us in that way.
It's wonderful. Thank you. Or is it our friends? Or as Christians, is it Jesus Christ? I want to look at one or two of the ways in which Mark unpacks his authority in this chapter, chapter 3.
He has authority in the first place, and this is what I talked about with the children, to interpret the Bible. The first six verses is that miracle that he performs, where he restates their own interpretation of the fourth commandment, this Sabbath day.
[4:02] The Lord's day was given, God knows, Jesus knows. It was part of this great moral structure of ten simple commands.

It set up a good day, a day, and it maybe impinges a little bit on tonight, on the theme of work, and our theme tonight is work, and that's what we're going to talk about at Identity as well, about this

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pattern of work and rest.
This is God's pattern for us, and he cares about us, and he's a good God, and he gives us a day when we can look to him, and it's a day when we can trust in what he has done, and the rest, the rest, so spiritual rest that he has won for us on the cross.
It's a great day, a great day for us, and yet the religious leaders of the day, you know, they took that day completely, differently. They saw the law of God as something that they could use to control people, and they could use to justify themselves before God.
Oh, we can take these ten commands, we can adopt them, and adapt them a little bit, and change them, and we can obey them, and we'll be right before God because we do all these outward things. We observe the Sabbath in this hugely legalistic way, and we justify ourselves before God, and we can condemn others because we can say, look what I do, and look what they don't do.
[5:26] So it's all about condemning others, justifying themselves, making legalistic what God meant to be something good and blessed for us. And Jesus says, no, you're wrong, you're absolutely wrong.

You know, it's a day for doing good, it's a day for giving life, it's a day for our good and for our blessing, and so he reinterprets it in the way it was intended to be.
And you know what I find amazing about that miracle, what he's done, is the dogged determination of the Pharisees to destroy Jesus. When they see the miracle, you would think they would say, oh man, we got it wrong.
He is right, you know, and he's already healed people and he's forgiven sins and he's made people, but they don't, they are so blinded to him, they say, right, he's going to ruin things for us.
He's going to take away our position, he's going to take away our importance, he's going to take away our whole basis for living and our identity. Let's get rid of him, let's annihilate him.
[6:22] It's amazing. Jesus has this authority and people, particularly those religious people who put their trust in their religion and their good works, they hate the challenge and authority he brings in.

And I wonder today, can we see that? It's a really important question, particularly for us as church people, can we see that? How do we use the laws of God? Do we use the laws of God, the Bible rules and regulations that are given by God?
Do we use them to justify ourselves? Do we take them down a list and tick them off? Or do you remember Mordor's testimony when he was up here and Mordor said, when I was preaching on the Ten Commandments, every time he looked at them he thought, oh yeah, I think I've got that one, okay.
And then as it was opened up from Scripture, he realized he was completely lost. And do we see that ourselves? Or do we use the laws of God to say, yep, I'm okay, Day of Judgment, I'll be fine, we tick them off and we judge other people and say, well, I'm better than them, I can keep that law. I can do that and they can. And so we kind of put a moral protection around ourselves. Is that how we live?
[7:34] So that when Jesus says, you're lost, Jesus says, our righteousness is like filthy rags. When Jesus says, I have come to put things right, does it just leave you cold?

The Jesus of Miracles, just you close the book on Jesus of Miracles, I'm not interested in that. I've got my own way, I'll make my own way back to God. The law, you see, the law isn't to justify us before God.
It's not something we're to try and attain to, to please God. The law exposes that we can never be right with God. It's there to point us to Jesus Christ and say, oh Lord God, please, I need you.
I need your salvation. I need your grace. That's what the law is. It's a school teacher to draw us gently and beautifully to Christ.
We need his forgiveness and we need his grace. His miracles, can you see and understand and respond to them today? His authority to interpret the Bible.
[8:35] He also, if you go into verses 11 and 12, 7 through 12, his authority over the powers of darkness. Now, you may be uncomfortable reading a passage like that and speaking about Jesus in relation to the evil spirits.

We think, well, that's kind of out of our comfort zone. We don't speak about that much today. We don't really believe much in that today, do we? Well, we do recognize and see and appreciate this unseen spiritual battle.

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Do we not? We recognize that in life and we recognize that spiritually from the word that there is this unseen battle of which Christ is the victor.
But there is evil that is destroyed of which devil is a source. We look to that when we're looking at Genesis a few weeks ago. Our rebellion has opened us up to that whole kingdom of darkness.
But you know what's interesting about this passage is the submission of these evil spirits to Jesus. We recognize him, he goes up as he goes on to say that they fell down before him and cried out, you're the Son of God.
[9:50] And he tells him to shut up. Shut up! I don't want powers of darkness to be the ones to declare who I am.

He is absolute authority over them from the desert that we looked at last week to the cross. He is revealing his authority and his power and his strength over evil.
And the cross is of course where he defeated it ultimately and defeated hell and the grave and death and was resurrected from that.
So that we recognize in our teaching from the New Testament that our struggle, our struggle in Ephesians 6-12 is not against flesh and blood but against the authorities, the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.
Are we going to go out in the streets with placards? Are we going to condemn people? I don't think so. I don't think we should be doing that.
[10:59] We should be on our knees because the battles are spiritual ones and we win it on our knees and we win it by living a life of grace and goodness and dependence on Jesus Christ and by standing up for Jesus in that way.

The God of this age, 2 Corinthians 4-4, is blinded the minds of unbelievers so they cannot see the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The religious leaders couldn't see it. The evil spirits could clearly see who Jesus was.
Isn't that paradoxical? But when death comes to us, when death comes into our lives, out of experience, none of us can say, live.
None of us can choose to defeat death. None of us can choose to say, well, I'm not going to die today if that's the day we die.
But Jesus can say, live because he is authority and he takes and breaks the power of darkness on our behalf. He is authority over evil spirits.
[12:07] In third place we see he is authority to call people to himself. The appointing of the 12 disciples are there, 12 apostles, 13 to 19. He is God, the Son of God, and he's calling these disciples to himself.

What's he calling them to? There's a couple of things very quickly. He's calling them to companionship, that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach.
He wants them, this motley crew, that's who Jesus, the Son of God, wants to be with him. That's his 12 apostles. That's his 12 next in line people as the King of Kings and the Lords of Lords.
It's amazing, it's great, it's encouraging, they're so ordinary. They are so stunningly unremarkable, these 12 disciples. All of them failed Jesus, all of them let him down.
One of them never even trusted him in the first place. And the rest took a lifetime to understand the way of the cross. Isn't that a huge encouragement today? It's a great encouragement for me.
[13:16] I hope it's an encouragement for you that Jesus wants people like that to be alongside him. He chooses to be his trusted followers.

And I think I'm mixing up my sermons, I think it's maybe tonight. But these are also the ones who turned the world upside down. They're the ones who turned the world upside down.
He wanted them for companionship and he wanted them to share his glory. Not only that he might send them out to preach but they might have authority also to drive out demons, to do the same work that Jesus was doing, to be co-workers, to share in his glory.
These ordinary punters became the 12 foundation blocks of the whole New Testament church with all their lack of CV qualifications.
And they were able by God's strength and in God's strength to defeat the powers of darkness and to push back the gates of hell to have the same authority because Jesus delegates that authority to his people.
[14:21] That's a great king, isn't it? That's a great king. I went to see a film last night and I forgot the name of it, Ross, what was the name of it?

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Wreck-it Ralph. Yeah, Wreck-it Ralph. I went to see Wreck-it Ralph with the boys. And there was a bit in that about a king but he wasn't wanting to delegate any of his power.
He wanted to keep it all to himself. And that's sometimes what kings do. And sometimes in the church we become Wreck-it Ralph's as well and we want to keep all the power and authority to ourselves.
But Jesus, the one who had every right to keep all the authority and the power to himself, he gives it out to these jars of clay, to these stumbling, falling, broken, misunderstanding people.
And it's a great reality that he shares that authority. But today I would like to ask in the light of that, do we recognise and hear the call of Jesus Christ in our own lives also?
[15:31] What is a kind of quiet, distant call, way back from all the other important calls in our lives?

But do we recognise the authority, not just the authority as over evil spirits or over illness or over death at that level in terms of healing, but the authority that we come to date on the Lord's Day, on the first day of the week, the authority of the resurrection.
That first day that we meet together on the Lord's Day, the first day of the week because it reminds us of His authority, of His resurrection power. This today is a living Savior. I've heard some amazingly good things this week about God still at work in this city in Edinburgh and that's a great encouragement.
And He's calling people, He's calling people to Himself. Do you hear that call with authority? He's calling us as Christians to companionship with Him.
I want you to be with me, He says. I want that. I want you, He says. He wants us to share His glory. In other words, He wants us to be participators in this work that He does.
[16:35] He says, I want you to more than sin, Rose, and just say you believe. He wants more than that, doesn't He? Because James says, even the devil say I believe and shudder.

We see it in this passage. They could fall down in their knees and say, this is the Son of God. Well, maybe we can all say that today, but He wants more than head knowledge. He wants more than intellectual assent.
He wants us to entrust our lives in Him and participate in the sharing of the kingdom and be those who push back the gates of hell.
He wants us to be empowered to do that work. And that's exactly why these ordinary bunch of disciples became world beaters. That's why they turned the world upside down, because they depended on the power of God in their lives and it was a remarkable story.
If you're bored by the gospel, always go back to Acts, go back and see that early New Testament church, how it turned the world upside down. We can't change hearts.
[17:33] We're not more powerful than darkness in our own strength. Death is aging and all that goes with it is a powerful force. But in Christ we are being renewed day by day.

We're getting younger spiritually. We are serving Him and His kingdom is coming. What a great calling. As Kate was saying, what a great calling we have.
Are we choosing just to stay in the gutter? Are we? Are we choosing to stay in the gutter? Or are we hearing the call? Well-timed.
Hey, don't undermine God. He will use technology if that is His desire. Fourth thing is authority over forgiveness. I'm not going to say much about this because we talked about this before.
But in verses 20 to 30 there's that stunningly frightening passage about the audacity of the religious leaders who were attributing the goodness and the grace of God to Satan.
[18:36] They were saying that it's by the prince of demons that he does, it's by B. Elzibar, that Jesus is doing what he's doing. And Jesus comes out with some of the most powerful and strong-worded defence against what they say, and he speaks about his authority to forgive, that anyone will come who will come will be forgiven except those who blaspheme against the Holy Spirit.

And of course there's been lots written about what that is and what that involves. And the one comforting thing is anyone who thinks they've committed that sin undoubtedly will not have done so because the whole teaching of Scripture seems to be that it's from this determined, brutal, hardened, vicious heart that says, no, no, never, never.
This is bad, this is evil. I will never seek his repentance and all the good he does I will attribute to Satan. And it's an implacable hatred that seems to be so hard that never seeks forgiveness.

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But I think the challenge and the concern for us is to remember that we all believe in justice, we do, I assure you. Everyone here believes in justice.
It doesn't matter what kind of justice or standard we have, we all have our own standard of justice, everyone whether they're believers, atheists or whatever, everyone has an understanding and a belief in justice.
[20:01] And what Jesus is reminding us is that his is the ultimate standard, not our own, not our societies, not any particular culture, but God who made us is the ultimate judge.

And ultimate justice, ultimate justice, which we will all stand before, is cross shaped. It's cross shaped.
Justice we can only understand it biblically coming through the cross and through the justice and the love of Jesus that kiss mutually at the cross where his pure justice is poured out in this mysterious way on his own beloved son and where his love for his lost people is met in the salvation that he is wrought through that.
So ultimately what Jesus is really saying is if you reject Jesus there is no forgiveness. And that's the solid truth.
We might feel miles away from being those who are near to dealing or being guilty of the unforgivable sin, but the deeper reality is if we reject Jesus as Lord and Savior there is no other forgiveness because he is the judge and he is the redeemer and justice is cross shaped or channeled through the perspective must come through the cross of Jesus.
[21:35] So that's both hugely comforting and also solemn. It's hugely comforting if you come to church today full of burdens and darkness and full of guilt and a feeling that you've just done too many bad things that you can't possibly be forgiven.

And he says, oh please come to me, all you that labor in heavily. I will give you this. I can forgive. You know, I'm big enough to forget I've done this huge work in the cross and it's great to know that he never turns away anyone who comes to him and that's what we're looking for and longing for in this day and age.
And I heard an interesting fact yesterday about Britain today and I think it's probably a condemnation of the church in some ways. But a statistic, I can't remember who the statistic was from.
The statistic was that most people now come to Jesus Christ in the UK through dreams and visions and eventually people come into the world.
Now why is that? I think part of the reason is that we need to remind ourselves and be reminded that this is a supernatural work and it's not enough just to reason together, although that's hugely important.
[22:59] It's not enough just to sit in church and intellectually ascent or otherwise to the Gospel. It's this spiritual work that is not unreasonable but comes beyond and above reason and needs the intervention of God to bring us to himself.

I'm not in any way decrying or minimizing the importance of the preached word and the lived word and the spoken word but isn't it interesting that we maybe need reminded of the reality of God and his authority breaking in and calling us to himself.
The last thing and with this we finish as we've taken a quick sprint through this chapter is Jesus' authority to redefine family.
We come to this last section and a lot of people find this a very hard section of the Bible of the Gospel where Jesus' mum and brothers are standing outside and they think he's out of his mind earlier on because he's not been able to eat food and the crowds are around about him and then they come back and someone goes into Jesus and says, you know, your mum and your brothers are here.
He says, wait a minute, who are my mother? Who's my brothers? He says, all these people that do the will of God, they're my family. Now we need to recognize that he's teaching something very important there and we must also recognize it in the light of his other teaching about family and about parental respect and love.
[24:39] He's not rubbishing the blood family, he's not denying his parents and his family in this passage every reason to believe that his brothers, some of them certainly became believers themselves and followed and recognized them as Lord and Master and of course we have the beautiful and very powerful interaction between Jesus and his mother on the cross and how he hands over, as it were, his mother to the care of the beloved disciple John.

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But he is teaching us that the family, as it were, the nuclear family or the earthly family does mirror something deeper, something bigger, something more everlasting.
That is the family of God and he is saying that when we come into the kingdom, we come into a family of love and a family of compassion and a family of loyalty and a family of care and a family of grace and that is what he came to establish, a family beyond earthly families, not in any way diminishing the role and importance of earthly families but saying that there's a spiritual family that the local church is to reflect, where grace is the atmosphere, where forgiveness is the norm and for Christ is the head.
That is what we recognize. He is saying you're not just saved in isolation, you're not just saved to skip along the road to heaven on your own but there is this fantastically significant family that he wants us to recognize and that would have been a great comfort to maybe some of the early believers in Rome to whom this gospel would have been written, Gentiles, who would have been ostracized from their families and thrown out because of their faith in Jesus Christ and were lonely and were alone and were unloved and he is saying, well the model is this family of God and it should be for us and the people of God and the church of God should be a place that is a comfort to the lonely, a huge strength to those who are broken and those whose family situations are hugely dysfunctional and we know the church is also dysfunctional and we know that we struggle together and we know that sometimes we love the thought of blood being thicker but we know sometimes that it is difficult for us to live that way together in grace but isn't it interesting in a week where the government has taken on itself the authority to redefine marriage and by implication family that Jesus is the only one who can do that and he does so in the light of the kingdom of God and that might possibly mean for us that being part of Christ's family will bring us into a collision course with the thinking and the philosophy and the direction in which this world is going so that we will need one another and we will need each other's grace and love and we will fight but we will fight with the weapons that Jesus asks us to fight with, the weapons of grace and forgiveness and compassion and belonging and truth share respectfully and in love and we will need to stand up to reflect Jesus Christ and His way because this is very much about lordship and authority and a question for us always in our lives when there are two paths to take under whose authority am I and which way will I go, my way or Christ's way, am I Lord or is Christ Lord and that for us all at different stages and ways and times in our lives will be a huge challenge and we will only be able to move forward by His grace through the prism of the cross when we understand how much He loves us and how much He has paid to set us free.
Let's bow our heads and pray together. Heavenly Father we ask and pray that you would guide us and protect us and keep us as we live our Christian lives.
[29:29] We pray that you would watch over us. We pray that as we are pushed and it's maybe not a bad thing as we are pushed to the side margins of society with no voice may we find that we have a powerful voice through grace.

Through living as Christ wants us to live, through recognizing that the judgment that we often want to pour out scornfully on a world that doesn't believe is not for us to do, that is God's work but we are to share and to live the good news and we are to show the authority of Jesus in our lives in a respectful and gracious way.
So help us to do that. Help us to do that together. May we share that community of family as we follow God's will not in our own strength and not to earn anything from you but as we seek to display your kingdom and your kingdom coming through the grace of Jesus Christ and knowing that those who love Jesus also seek by His grace and the power of the Spirit to obey Him.
May that be your life and may that be your calling and may we be able to see this city turned upside down for Jesus Christ. There's a lot more than 12 of us here and yet with 12 Jesus ushered in His kingdom and absolutely showed His power even though they were jars of clay and in our weakness and our frailty and our lack of faith and our doubts and our struggles.
May it push us to Jesus and may His strength and His kingdom be astonishing in progressing the gospel. We ask this with all our hearts and with a desire to be forgiven and cleansed.
[31:36] In His precious name, Amen.

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