

Responding to the King

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[0 : 00] Well, I once brought a friend to church, and she wasn't a Christian, and we sat through a great evening meeting, you know, persuasive, talk about Jesus from the Bible, sincere, passionate, sung worship, and a loving community, a joyful welcome.

It was the kind of evening that made me want to become a Christian all over again. And I said to her afterwards, what did she think? And she said, that was really interesting, really interesting to be here. What I'm most interested in, though, is the phenomenon of belief.

So she doesn't believe there's a God. What she was fascinated by was looking around and seeing people believe this, that people do believe. And maybe you're here this morning, and that's what you think.

You're coming along with a friend, or maybe you're a Christian, and you know that's what your friends think about all of this, that they think it's a phenomenon that seemingly normal, reasonable, nice people would believe what we believe about Jesus.

They're amazed by belief. Well, this morning, we learn what amazed Jesus, what amazes him, which is quite a thought, isn't it, when you see what he could do?

[1 : 19] The spirit-empowered, miracle-working King of glory. What amazes Jesus? We're starting this new series, as James said, in Mark's Gospel, and we join the action after incredible scenes in Mark chapters 4 and 5.

It's a new phrase, isn't it? Absolute scenes. I hear people saying that all the time. It's absolute scenes. Mark chapters 4 and 5, absolute scenes. It's already the crowds surrounding Jesus, wherever he goes, and in chapters 4 and 5, a key word for you when you're reading chapters 4 and 5 of Mark's Gospel is the word even, even.

End of chapter 4, Jesus calms a storm, and his followers with him in the boat are terrified, and they say, who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him.

And then, you get into Mark chapter 5, and he frees a man from even a legion of evil spirits inside a man, even a legion.

Authority over evil power. And then he heals a sick woman who has been bleeding for 12 years. Even a woman who's been bleeding for 12 years.

[2 : 25] And he says to her, daughter, daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering. And then he even raises a dead girl to life.

She's 12 years old. She's died. He can even raise her to life. So when Jesus comes to his hometown, bringing the 12 with him, they're amazed by him.

They're amazed. Not amazed that people would believe in him. They're amazed by Jesus, the phenomenon of Jesus. But amazement doesn't always lead you to the right conclusions.

So that's our first point this morning. The town that took offense when they saw him. He goes to teach in the synagogue, as a teacher would do. And the kind of evidence we're given in Mark's gospel about Jesus, they're given.

It's exactly what they see and hear. You can see that in verse 2. Many who heard him were amazed. Where did this man get these things, they asked. What's this wisdom that has been given him?

[3 : 26] What are these remarkable miracles he is performing? But the problem for them is that Jesus is just too familiar to them. So look at verse 3.

Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?

And they took offense at him. They can't see past the human side of Jesus. Hang on, isn't this Mary's lad? He fitted my kitchen, didn't he?

He made that chest of drawers we've got in the spare room. And you're not seriously telling me he's God's promised king, are you? And Jesus then says, this is typical of what happens with those who are familiar with a messenger from God.

Verse 4. He says, a prophet is not without honor except in his own town, among his relatives, and in his own home. And now it's Jesus who is amazed.

[4 : 26] You see that in verse 6? He was amazed at their lack of faith. I can think of twice that Jesus is amazed. Luke tells us that he is amazed by the great faith of a Roman soldier.

He says, I'm not worthy to receive you, but just say the word and my servant will be healed. And Jesus is amazed by the faith. And here, he's amazed by the lack of faith of people who have seen and heard so much.

And so he moves on. And verse 5 tells us he moves on. He could not do any miracles there except lay his hands on a few people who were ill and heal them. And I take it there Mark's not saying that it was physically impossible for Jesus to do miracles.

Jesus can do anything. It's that it was morally impossible for him. For he had committed himself that his miracles would be signs for those who have hearts open.

Signs that show us who he is and the kind of kingdom he'll one day bring. As he acted with power and compassion. But where people's hearts are closed, morally he can't do miracles for them.

[5 : 36] And maybe to some of us there's a caution here because Jesus is very familiar to us. And sometimes that's a great blessing. Of course that's a great blessing that Jesus would be familiar to us.

But other times it can be a stumbling block about Jesus. Where we might find ourselves thinking, isn't this still just the man I heard about when I was little? Hasn't the world moved on since then? I've met so many people who don't know about him. I think of friends who've experienced enough kind of churchianity when they were growing up. That it's kind of inoculated them against the gospel.

I'm not sure they've ever really heard the gospel or understood it. But it's as though because they experienced kind of going to church. Going through some rites of maybe getting christened and being around church.

Maybe school assemblies that had something about Jesus. Maybe a school chapel even. That it's sort of, they think they've heard it all before. And they think, no, no, it's not for me.

[6 : 41] And it stops them taking a fresh look as an adult at the real Jesus in Mark's gospel. And they take offense at him. Isn't that quite similar to what we're seeing there in the hometown?

Jesus is amazed at their lack of faith. So does that stop Jesus in his tracks? Well, not at all. And that's our second point. The twelve who spread the news all about him.

So let's pick things up again in verse 7 and see Jesus' response to that rejection. Jesus went around teaching from village to village. He moves on to gather a people. Well, verse 7, calling the twelve to him, he began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over impure spirits. So these twelve then become extensions of Jesus' ministry to go on spreading the word. They've got the same message as him. In verse 12, they preach repentance.

That is, turning back to God for the forgiveness of sins because his king is now here. We know that was Jesus' message from chapter 1 of Mark's gospel that he says that's why he's come, to bring that message to the world about himself.

[7 : 46] And they're given that message and they're given his authority to drive out evil spirits from people and heal the sick. And he tells them, don't take anything with you, just a staff. So they're going to be reliant as they go to new towns on people's good favor, that they would receive them because they're receiving the one who sent them.

And it's a picture of this kind of moving on in a rush with the news. Like the messengers of a king having a great military victory and rushing from town to town saying he's won, he's coming back. They're to move on, to keep moving and spread the news about Jesus. The kingdom of God has come near in this man. And at the same time as he sends them, he prepares them for rejection. Of him. So have a look with me at verse 11 and we see him bring that out. Verse 11, and if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, leave that place and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.

Now this is a highly significant moment in human history. For God's people at that time, you were God's people when you trusted God and you lived in the promised land.

[9 : 00] And the Jewish people, when they went into foreign land, Gentile land, outside the kingdom of God, as they came back into Israel, they would shake the dust off their feet.

And it was a way of saying, I'm home now. I'm back among God's people, in God's place. And I'm not contaminated by where I've been.

Now Jesus sends his followers to be among the towns of Israel within the promised land. And he's saying, if they reject your message about me, as you leave, shake the dust off your feet as a testimony to them.

In other words, there is this realignment happening of the people of God around the king, around Jesus, now that he's come. And if you want to be one of God's people now, if you want to be a child of Abraham now and inherit God's promises, if you want to be part of the kingdom God is building now, you have to receive Jesus.

The question everyone is being sharply drawn to in Mark chapter 6 is, who do you say he is? Who is Jesus? And it leaves some people who think they're insiders of the people of God on the outside.

[10 : 21] They think they're on the inside because of their religion. But if they reject Jesus, they're on the outside. And on the other side of that, the wonderful news is if you're someone who's put your trust in Jesus, if you're willing to say, I think he is who he claimed to be, God's promised king, his rescuing king, you have everything if you have him.

It doesn't matter if you're not from a Christian background. It doesn't matter if you kind of don't know the songs on a Sunday when you come to church or when you meet other people, you feel like they kind of grew up in Christian homes and you feel like an outsider.

None of that matters if you can say, this is who Jesus is. When we have him, we have everything. You're with the life giver, the sin forgiver, the sin doctor, the righteous one.

And you lack nothing if you have him. And when people want to know what defines us as people, we're defined by him, by our response to him.

It's all about him. So that's our second point. The 12 who spread the news all about him. And the news spread so far, it reaches the ears of the king himself, the tetrarch, the governor of that region.

[11 : 35] Mark calls him the king, Herod. But for him, for Herod, it is deeply disturbing news that he hears about Jesus. So that's our third point. We've heard of the town that took offense when they saw him.

Now we hear of the king who heard the truth but wouldn't change. So I don't know if you noticed there, what we get here now is a flashback in Mark's gospel, a long flashback.

Because what sparks it is we hear that Herod's hearing the news, that everyone's asking, who is this man? Who is Jesus? Jesus. And some people are saying that he's Elijah, who was an Old Testament prophet from centuries ago and who had gone to heaven and they would trust him would come back.

And other people are saying he's like the prophets of long ago. But Herod says, verse 16, Herod's verdict is John, whom I beheaded, has been raised from the dead.

And that is the paranoia of a guilty man. It's the paranoia of a guilty conscience. And soon in chapter 8, Jesus will get with his disciples on a boat and he'll say to them, he urges them, watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and Herod.

[12 : 47] Yeast, if you think about yeast, you use a little bit and it permeates a whole batch of dough. It gets in everything. And we're to think, well, what is the yeast of Herod?

What is it about him that we are to watch out for? Jesus urges us, watch out for it. Don't be like him. So it's an incredible story of what happened to Herod.

And it's a story about choices. The choices of a very powerful man. His father, Herod the Great, was the one who had heard, you know, the Magi went to and he heard that the king had been born and he ordered the slaying of the baby boys around Bethlehem.

That's this Herod's father. This is Herod Antipas. So he's now ruling over the region, the son of Herod the Great. And he hears the news about God's king coming, this time through John the Baptist, who was this sent prophet, the ultimate prophet to point people to Jesus.

John's message was good news. He points people to Jesus and says, look, it's the Lamb of God who will take away the sin of the world. But it was very challenging news, very confronting news. For John the Baptist said, produce fruit in keeping with repentance.

[14 : 03] In other words, if you want to show that you're a healthy tree, if you want to show that you've turned back to God and you're trusting him, let me see the fruit in your life of that change of

heart.

And Herod had John arrested and thrown into prison. And now we hear about Herod's first choice. It's that Herod chose desire over repentance. On the sheets there.

Herod chose desire over repentance. We'll pick things up at verse 17. So Herod the Great had other sons, also called Herod.

And one of them was this man, Herod Philip. So Mark just calls him Philip here. And he married someone called Herodias. In my family growing up, it was quite confusing because everyone was called either Julie or Alan.

I remember one of my relatives started going out with a guy called Alan. And I remember thinking, how could she possibly have done this to me? Because I had Uncle Alan.

[15:25] And then there was another Alan called Our Alan. That's what he called him, Our Alan. And then he was married to someone called Julie. And now Our Julie was going out with this guy called Alan.

And I was thinking, what are we going to call him? Anyway, you can imagine that in Herod's house, can't you? There's Herod the Great and he's got these sons. What are we going to call them? That's Herod. Herod Antipas. Herod Philip.

And then Herod brings home Herodias. But what happens to Herod Antipas, the one Mark describes here as the king, is that for all his power, he still desires things that he can't have.

And that's what power does to you. It's so typical of people with power. It's the seduction. It leaves you wanting more. And you're miserable until you get what someone else has that you still don't have.

So Herod Antipas was married, but he decided he wanted to be with Herod Philip's wife. Maybe you can picture what it was like when he first met her. And they felt the excitement of a connection.

[16:27] Maybe we can imagine there were flirty glances with one another. And then Antipas started indulging his thought life, his fantasies about being with her. And then there was the thrill of the chase.

And eventually it leads to Antipas divorcing his wife and bringing Herodias from his brother and marrying her instead. She comes with her daughter Salome to come and live with him.

And presumably everyone's then happy with the arrangement. At least that's sorted now. Herod will be quiet for a while. Except John the Baptist is not happy.

Because he's godly enough and he's brave enough to say this affair is wrong in the eyes of the living God. But just because indulging your desires feels good doesn't mean it's right.

Doesn't mean it's good. So Herodias, she hates John. And she wants him killed. But we hear what the king thought of John in verse 20.

[17:30] Just have a look at verse 20. Herod feared John and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man. When Herod heard John, he was greatly puzzled, yet he liked to listen to him.

I don't know what you think about that verdict. But I think that's very haunting to hear that. You just picture Herod summoning John, who's bound in a prison cell, every week.

Bringing him up week by week. He wants to hear from John again. The guards unlock the cell door. They untie him. They bring him to Herod. And Herod listens. Boy, does he listen.

He hangs on his every word. He's trying to understand John's message. And what does he realize? He realizes this is a good man. He knows he's hearing truth from John the Baptist.

He knows this man is righteous. This man is holy. And this is important. This is good. I need to hear this. Get him back. And any of us could be like Herod here.

[18:35] He looks like the model growth group member. The model roots member. He's there every week. Opening the Bible. Listening in. He's clearly convicted. He knows what's right.

And I can picture John's disciples hearing about it. Have you heard? John keeps having to go and speak to Herod. Let's pray. Let's pray that Herod gets converted. What an impact that could have.

He's hearing him. And then it dawns on you. Herod is just never going to change. He's never going to let God be on the throne of his life. And maybe there are days that it dawns on him.

That if only he would turn back to God. It would fulfill everything his heart longs for. But he already feels he's past the point of no return. With Herodias. He's driven too far down the street called desire.

And he thinks turning back to God. Would cost him too much. He's too far gone now. And it's a cautionary tale in Mark 6 for us.

[19 : 40] That we might get to a point where we can think of an area in our own life. Where we know what the right thing is to do. We know what would be right. Maybe in our case it's even a relationship.

Like it was with Herod. That's unhelpful. Maybe it's something else. An area where we know to bring it into the light. And repent. Is the right thing to do.

And that's Herod's first choice. He chooses desire over repentance. Second thing he does is he chooses delay over decision. You wonder how long did this go on for?

He keeps bringing John the Baptist up. Herod summoning John. And listening to him. Picture Herodias all that time. You know in the poem Tamashanta. Robbie Burns' poem.

Tamashanta is out getting drunk. And it talks. There's this line about his wife. What is it? It's something about. It says. Gathering her brows before the storm.

[20 : 38] Nursing her wrath to keep it warm. Waiting for him to come home drunk. And have a row. Well Herodias. She's nursing her wrath.

Not about Herod getting drunk. About he keeps listening to John the Baptist. When will he get rid of him? And he doesn't have John executed because he knows the truth.

But he just keeps putting it off. And that's so tempting for us, isn't it? In life. That we might get to thinking. I'll sort my relationship out with Jesus.

Or I'll sort out this area of sin in my life. When I'm just a bit less busy. Or we think. I'll probably become a Christian at some point. Just not yet.

Not right now. I've just got too much I'm committed to. And again. Herod's story is a cautionary tale. For us. Because you never know.

[21 : 33] When the time will be up. And it will be too late. And in verse 21. There's this haunting phrase. It says. Finally. The opportune time came.

And it's the opportune time for Herodias. And it means for Herod. The time's gone. Herod throws a party. Which is the epitome. Of human power. It's his birthday party.

And look who gets an invite. In verse 21. Herod gave a banquet. For his high officials. And military commanders. And the leading men of Galilee. So the single malt whiskey is flowing.

And champagne is being served. And at the height of it all. The daughter of Herodias. Salome. She comes in. And she dances. And verse 22. When the daughter of Herodias came in and danced.

She pleased Herod. And his dinner guests. And folks. This isn't a Kaylee here. She's not doing the Gay Gordons. This is a dance. Designed to entice.

[22 : 33] And seduce. Her stepdad. And his lecherous guests. And with the cocktail of alcohol. And sensuality. Herod boasts to her.

You can have anything you want. I'll give you whatever you ask. Up to half my kingdom. I'll give to you. Just ask. Whatever you want. And she goes out.

To see her mum. And verse 24. She says. What shall I ask for? And a smile breaks. On Herodias' face. And she thinks.

Finally. Quick as a flash. The head of John the Baptist. That's what you want. And look at the speed. Verse 25. At once the girl hurried in.

To the king. With the request. I want you to give me. Right now. The head of John the Baptist. On a dish. And you wonder. Do the guests.

[23 : 30] Kind of roar. Are you? Are you? Are you? Whoa-ho! Or does it all go eerily quiet? As people realize how awkward that is. And we get Herod's next choice. He chose popularity.

Over truth. Verse 26. The king was greatly distressed. But because of his oaths. And his dinner guests. He did not want to refuse her. And none of us is quite in Herod's position.

Today. But sometimes. You can get to a point where you know the right thing to do. But you know it would make you unpopular. You know that responding rightly to Jesus would make you unpopular.

And we see that Herod can't afford to lose his reputation. He can't bear the thought. Of having to climb down here. So he acts. And he chooses evil. Over humility.

Verse 27. So he immediately sent an executioner. With orders to bring John's head. The man went. Beheaded John.

[24 : 33] In the prison. And brought back his head on a dish. He presented it to the girl. And she gave it to her mother. It's a horrible moment isn't it?

A moment in Mark's gospel. Where we're being told. Let me show you. The epitome of human power without God. With the restraints off.

And I think lots of us in the Christian life. Can fall into thinking that by being with Jesus. You're missing out on the fun. You're missing out on the party. You know the world is out there.

Your mates are having fun. They're living the good life. Flying away on city breaks. Extending their homes. Eating out every weekend. Living the dream. Am I missing out?

And Mark chapter 6 speaks to us and says. Stop the formal. Stop the fear of missing out. This was the party of a decade in the Middle East.

[25 : 33] You'd have given anything to be on the guest list for this party. And look how it ends. When the lights get switched on at the end of the night. A world without God is grotty.

Imagine what the wives back home said when their husbands got back. What do you think they said as they nursed hangovers the next morning? And their wives said, what was it like last night? Did you have a good night?

And they say, something happened at the end. I don't want to talk about it. And it was all because Herod didn't have the humility just to climb down and say, I've made a mistake.

He couldn't lose face to protect a man who he knew was good. And he had him in prison. And lastly, we see he chose fear over freedom.

There's such irony in the story, isn't there? Because Herod is so powerful. He's got the Jews under his thumb. He's got the Roman power in the region. All these soldiers.

[26 : 34] And he's actually totally weak. He can't do what he knows is right. He's enslaved. Enslaved to his own desires. Enslaved to safeguarding his reputation.

Enslaved to the schemes of Herodias. And the result is that he is a haunted man. Haunted by a guilty conscience. And in verse 29, the people who loved John come and they take his body and they laid it in a tomb.

And soon Jesus' followers will have to do the same thing when they find him dead on the cross. And it reminds us it can be costly to be the messenger for a savior who had to die for his people.

And that's something he invites us all to be. His messengers. It can be a costly thing. If you stand with Jesus, you might find that you're rejected by your hometown.

You might find that you're rejected by people in your classroom. People in your workplace. People in your sports team. People in your friendship group. You might find yourself outside the party that everyone is thrilled to be at.

[27 : 46] And at the same time, as we read Mark 6, we can think to ourselves, is there anyone else you would ever want to be with? Let me invite you to ask yourself in Mark chapter 6, which king do you want to be with?

The king we see this morning? Or the king we'll see next week? Who has compassion on his people? And he feeds them until they're satisfied in the fields. He invites everyone next week in chapter 6.

For Jesus the king has his own banquet later on in Mark's gospel. The last supper. And we're going to remember it this morning as we share bread and wine together. And he breaks bread for his people.

And he pulls them wine. And he calls them friends. And Herod's supper ends with the brutal death of a prisoner. And the Lord Jesus invites us to his supper.

And it ends with the sacrificial death of the host. He dies so that he can freely invite us to feast with him in his banquet forever. Which king do we want to be with?

[28 : 52] Who do we say he is? Let's pray together. Let's pray together. Lord Jesus we praise you that you are good and compassionate.

That you are the promised rescuing king. That your mission was to save. That you are the life giver. By your spirit we pray that you would help us.

By shining into our hearts. The areas where we're drifting into making foolish choices. That you would strengthen our resolve to choose rightly.

To choose repentance. To choose to live your ways. Your ways of righteousness and truth. Whatever the cost. And we ask this for our good. And for your glory.

Amen.