

## **Week 6: Responding to Jesus**

### **Hook**



**Main Point:** Some people reacted positively to Jesus; others reacted negatively.

**Q:** How do you typically respond to something new? Are you an investigator? An early adopter?

**Q:** Is there something you currently enjoy but strongly disagreed with at some point?

There are only a few things that nearly everyone agrees on – such as the belief that doctors should wash their hands between procedures. But surprisingly, that wasn't always the case.

In the 1840s, a Hungarian doctor named Ignaz Semmelweis made a life-saving discovery. He observed two maternity wards at the hospital where he worked: one run by male doctors and medical students, the other by female midwives. Shockingly, the mortality rate in the ward run by doctors was nearly five times higher than in the midwife-run ward. But why?

After careful observation, Semmelweis identified a key difference: The male doctors and students regularly performed autopsies, while the midwives did not. Though germ theory was still unknown, Semmelweis concluded that the doctors were carrying something – likely from the deceased – and unintentionally transmitting it to the mothers during childbirth.

His solution was simple but revolutionary: He instructed the doctors and students to wash their hands and instruments with a chlorine solution before examining patients. The results were dramatic. Mortality rates in the doctors' ward dropped significantly.

You'd think such a breakthrough would be welcomed. But instead of embracing it, the medical community rejected and ridiculed him. Semmelweis became increasingly

frustrated and erratic. He was eventually committed to an asylum, where he died tragically. His discovery, which forms the foundation of modern medical hygiene, was only recognized and accepted years after his death.

**Q: Why might the medical community have opposed Dr. Semmelweis's counsel?**

Accepting Semmelweis's findings would have meant admitting they had been unintentionally harming their patients – and that they were wrong. That kind of confession takes humility. Instead, many responded with pride and denial. It wasn't just a challenge to their methods; it was a challenge to their identity and credibility.<sup>1</sup>

**Transition:** It's hard to imagine that the medical community would have turned its back on Dr. Semmelweis. Today, we'll explore how different groups of people responded to the message and ministry of Jesus; from the disciples who embraced Christ and found life, to the religious leaders who opposed him and found judgment.

**Recap:** In our first lesson, we learned about the author, audience, genre and occasion of the Gospel of Mark. Gospels are not just stories, biographies or history books; they are proclamations of the Gospel, like sermons. Mark's focus on Jesus' action more than His teaching propels us to consider how we will act in response.

In lessons 2 through 4, we saw how every part of Jesus' ministry pointed to His kingship as the Messiah they had been waiting for, but a different kind of kingdom than they expected – a spiritual kingdom that is upside down from the kingdoms of this world. We saw Jesus' power not only to heal, cast out demons, and perform miracles but even to forgive sin, making Him equivalent to God.

In the last lesson, we saw Jesus' behaving differently from the typical religious leaders of His day and flipping their social systems upside down. Jesus wasn't adding something new to the old ways of doing things; He was building a new thing. He wasn't rejecting God's original law but rejecting the additions the Pharisees had made to the law. His "new thing" fulfilled what God originally created in the beginning – a relationship between God and His people with no barriers or boundaries from sin.

In this lesson, we will see how some people reacted positively to Jesus and others reacted negatively. You would think there wouldn't be negative reactions to Jesus with all the good He did, that everyone would love Him and flock to Him. And many people did. But many in the crowd were just there for the miracles. And the religious and political leaders felt threatened by Him. But the few who really knew Him as Lord laid down their lives and followed Him as disciples.

## **Week 6: Responding to Jesus**

### **Book**

**Main Point:** Some people reacted positively to Jesus; others reacted negatively.

**Mark 3:1–12 [Read]**

**Talking Point 1:** As Jesus grew in popularity with the crowds, the Pharisees conspired to kill Him.

**Q: Why were the people in synagogue watching Jesus closely?**

**Q: How did Jesus feel about those who were conspiring against Him?**

In the last lesson, Jesus told the religious leaders that the Sabbath was given as a gift to humanity, to bring us life and rest, not to burden us (Mark 2:27-28). Now Jesus encountered a man who needed healing on the Sabbath. The religious leaders were looking for a way to accuse Jesus, so they watched to see if He would “break” the Sabbath – according to their rules, not God’s law. Jesus knew they were trying to trap Him, but He didn’t hide what He was doing. He put the man in front of everyone and asked them what was lawful.

Jesus was giving them a chance to see how their extra rules were hurting people. How they put an unnecessary burden on people and completely missed the spirit of the law, which was to bring life to people, not hurt them. Asking a question was a well-known method of teaching in Greek philosophy, the Socratic method. Instead of telling students what to think, the teacher asked a series of questions to help them discover the truth for themselves. But Jesus’ opponents didn’t even answer.

In their honor/shame culture, it would have been a huge blow to their honor for experts like the Pharisees not to answer Jesus’ question. Challenging others intellectually in public was a big part of the honor system, which scholars call the “challenge-riposte,” like the intellectual equivalent of challenging someone to a duel. The person offering the challenge asked a challenging question and the other person responded, which was called the “riposte” or defense of the honor. If the answer was good enough, the honor challenge was defended. If not, the person would lose honor by not being able to answer well enough.<sup>2</sup>

In reading the Gospels, we see people challenge Jesus this way all the time. Every time Jesus responded to a challenge, no matter how tricky the question, He won. People were amazed by His answers. It was not as common to see Jesus making the challenge, but this time He did. Not because He was trying to strip them of their honor, but

because He wanted them to understand the purpose of the Sabbath and how following their rules would have hurt this man.

That the Pharisees did not answer meant they were publicly disgraced, which would have angered them. But Jesus was also angered by their silence. Not because they didn't answer His honor challenge, but because they were so blinded by their pride ("stubborn hearts") that they missed the heart of the law, which is love. The word here for anger is wrath, like God's wrath in the Day of Judgment (Romans 2:5). But He wasn't just angry, He was also moved with grief.

Jesus healed the man publicly, knowing it would anger the Pharisees. He did it anyway, not only because it was the right thing to do, but because it showed the Pharisees (whether they got it or not) and the crowds that God's law is about bringing life and doing good. Unfortunately, the Pharisees' response was not repentance but doubling down on their feelings about Jesus and joining Herod and Herodias in plotting to kill Him. With all the good Jesus was doing, how could anyone be against Him? How could the religious leaders be against healing someone? How did they not recognize Jesus as Messiah? They knew the prophecies better than anyone!

Meanwhile, large crowds were following Jesus because they had heard about all He was doing. They came to Galilee from all over Israel, even on the other side of the Jordan and way up north in Tyre and Sidon. But we don't know about these people's hearts. Were they really following Jesus as Lord or were they just looking for a miracle? This begs the question: What is my heart's true reaction to Jesus? Am I just looking for what Jesus can do for me? Am I looking for Him to be something other than what He is? Or am I really laying down my life, submitting to Him as Lord, and following Him as a disciple?

**Q: How have people in our culture treated Jesus as if they were just looking for what they could get from Him? Or looking for Him to be something other than what He is?**

**Q: Reflect on people you know who have had negative responses to Jesus. Why did they feel that way? What about their background, perspective or experience affected that?**

**Mark 3:13–19 [Read]**

**Talking Point 2:** Jesus chose His 12 disciples and gave them a mission.

**Q: Why do you think Jesus went up on the mountain to call His disciples?**

**Q: What is the significance of having 12 disciples? What does it represent?**

In the ancient world, people built altars on high places because it was believed to be physically closer to the gods. Israel also built their temple on a mountain that later would be called Mount Zion (Psalm 2:6). Throughout Scripture, people had encounters with God on mountains. Abraham went up the mountain to offer Isaac, which turned into a moment of grace (Genesis 22). God first appeared to Moses on a mountain (Exodus 3), and then he went up the mountain to meet with God and receive the Law (Exodus 19). Elijah went up Mount Carmel to confront the prophets of Baal with God's power (1 Kings 18), and later God appeared to him on the mountain in the low whisper (1 Kings 19). The Transfiguration of Jesus happened on a mountain (Mark 9), and Jesus went up the mountain to pray (Mark 6).

At this point in the story, with all these people reacting to Him in different ways, Jesus decided to officially call and appoint His apostles, give them the power to cast out demons and send them on the mission to preach the kingdom of God. He went up the mountain to do so, partly to get away from the crowds but also because this was a sacred moment. Jesus appointed 12 apostles, the same as the number of tribes in Israel. The first five disciples we have already met – the four fishermen and Matthew, the tax collector. The others we don't know much about:

- **Philip** was from Bethsaida. Jesus called him in Galilee, and he went to find Nathanael and told him they had found the Messiah. Philip was the one who asked Jesus where they should buy bread to feed the 5,000 (John 6) and asked Jesus to show them the Father (John 14).
- **Bartholomew** (aka Nathanael) came from Cana in Galilee. When Philip told him about Jesus, he said, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, He said, "Here truly is an Israelite in which there is no deceit." Because Jesus told Bartholomew He saw where he was before Philip called him, Bartholomew said, "You are the Son of God! You are the king of Israel!" (John 1).
- **Thomas** was also called Didymus, "the twin," though we never meet his twin. When Lazarus died, Thomas said they should follow Jesus even if it meant they died with him (John 11), and when Jesus said he was going away, Thomas asked for the way to follow (John 14). Though Thomas said he wouldn't believe the Resurrection without touching Jesus' hands and side, when he did see the wounds, he declared, "My Lord and my God!"
- **James "the less"** (the younger), also "son of Alphaeus," may mean he was Matthew's younger brother, but probably not because it doesn't explicitly say so, as with the others.
- **Thaddeus** (aka Jude or Judas [not Iscariot]) asked Jesus why He revealed Himself only to them and not the whole world (John 14:22). This is the only thing we see him do in the Gospels.

- **Simon the Zealot.** Zealots were a radical political group who incited the people of Judea to an armed revolt against Rome. They were definitely looking for a Messiah who would be a military leader, so it's surprising Jesus would call him, unless part of his becoming a disciple was leaving the mission of the Zealots behind.
- **Judas Iscariot.** Mark tells us right away that this is the Judas who would betray Jesus.

This was an unusual group of guys from all different backgrounds from throughout Galilee. None of them were experts in the law or religious leaders. None were wealthy, powerful or influential. But they believed Jesus was the Messiah and even confessed Him as the Son of God.

Jesus appointed them as apostles, which means messenger, but it was more than just a term; it was an office. In the Greek world, it was a messenger sent on mission with delegated authority from the king. This was a special office reserved for this first generation of the 12 (plus Paul) who first spread the Gospel message to the world. The apostles laid the foundation for the Christian faith that other generations built upon (Ephesians 2:20). Their purpose was to spread the message of the Gospel, but Jesus also gave them the authority to cast out demons, not only because miracles helped people believe they were from God but also because it showed what kind of king was coming. Casting out demons demonstrated that their king had authority over all the supernatural realm, and there was no evil in His kingdom.

Sandwiched between these two stories of people's negative responses to Jesus, we see the calling of His true disciples who really believed He was the Messiah and the Son of God and chose to follow Him with their lives. There was nothing special about them. Their qualification was their faith. They simply believed in Jesus.

**Q: What does it reveal about God's kingdom that He chose to build its foundation through ordinary men?**

**Q: How does Jesus' authority over evil change your walk with Him this week?**

**Mark 3:20–34 [Read]**

**Talking Point 3:** Even Jesus' own family said He was crazy!

**Q: Who said Jesus was crazy? Why? What was His response?**

**Q: Who said He was possessed by Satan? Why? What was His response?**

In this section, we see two more negative reactions to Jesus' ministry, which came after He called His disciples. This time it wasn't the religious or political leaders who felt threatened by His power or strangers who didn't really know Him. It was His own family!

Just after He commissioned His apostles, Jesus went home, and the crowd around Him was so packed that they couldn't even eat. When His family heard this, they went to get Him and bring Him inside so He could eat, saying He was out of His mind. When people told Him His mother and brothers were looking for him, Jesus responded that it was not His biological family but those who do the will of God who were His real family. At this point in the story, Jesus' family lacked a full understanding of His identity.

There were also scribes who came down from Jerusalem to see what it was all about, and they claimed that He was possessed by Beelzebub, another name for Satan, the prince of demons. Jesus told them that didn't make any sense. Why would He be casting out demons if He were a prince of demons?

British writer and literary scholar C. S. Lewis wrote that we can come to only one of three conclusions about Jesus – either He is a liar, a lunatic, or the Lord. We can't just believe He was a good teacher, because He claimed to be God. If He's not really God, then He was either a liar, intentionally deceiving people and therefore not a good moral teacher, or He was a madman who really was crazy. Lewis wrote, "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 patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to ... He did not produce that effect on any of the people who actually met him. He produced mainly three effects – hatred, terror, or adoration. There was no trace of people expressing mild approval."<sup>3</sup>

Those who felt threatened by Jesus responded with hatred or fear; those who were healed and witnessed miracles, with thanksgiving and awe – sometimes by worshipping and following Jesus but sometimes just taking the miracle and moving on. But true disciples of Jesus respond to Him by bowing down in worship and following Him as Lord. This is the only real response we can have to Jesus. Discipleship isn't some "mild approval" of Jesus. It isn't seeking Him out just looking for a miracle. It isn't church attendance and religious ritual. It's confessing Jesus as Lord and also treating Him as Lord – laying down your life, picking up your cross, and following Him wherever He leads. And sharing the message of the Gospel with anyone who will listen.

**Q: In what ways have you hesitated or resisted laying everything down to follow Jesus?**

**Q: Think about your unbelieving family or close friends. What are their biggest obstacles to accepting the Gospel by faith? How can our LifeGroup be praying for them?**

## **Week 6: Responding to Jesus**

### **Took**

**Main Point:** Some people reacted positively to Jesus; others reacted negatively.

Jesus is many things. He is:

- **Son of God** – *Matthew 3:17; John 20:31*
- **God in the Flesh** – *John 1:1,14; Colossians 2:9*
- **The Image of the Invisible God** – *Colossians 1:15*
- **Emmanuel (“God with us”)** – *Matthew 1:23*
- **Savior** – *Luke 2:11; John 4:42*
- **Redeemer** – *Titus 2:13–14; Isaiah 59:20*
- **Mediator between God and Man** – *1 Timothy 2:5*
- **Righteous Advocate** – *1 John 2:1–2*
- **The Resurrection and the Life** – *John 11:25*
- **King of Kings and Lord of Lords** – *Revelation 19:16*
- **Head of the Church** – *Ephesians 5:23; Colossians 1:18*
- **Judge of the Living and the Dead** – *Acts 10:42; 2 Timothy 4:1*
- **Sinless and Holy** – *Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 2:22*
- **Humble Servant** – *Philippians 2:5–8; John 13:4–5*
- **Compassionate** – *Matthew 9:36; Mark 6:34*
- **Teacher** – *John 3:2; Matthew 7:28–29*
- **The Good Shepherd** – *John 10:11*
- **Our Peace** – *Ephesians 2:14*
- **The Beginning and the End** – *Revelation 21:6*
- **Creator of All Things** – *John 1:3; Colossians 1:16*
- **Sustainer of All Things** – *Hebrews 1:3*
- **The Coming Judge and Returning King** – *Matthew 25:31–46; Revelation 22:12*

This week, consider Jesus’ identity, character, and actions. What is the appropriate response to Him? How do you see that reflected in your own life? Are there any practical steps you can take to further align yourself with that response?

### **CHALLENGES**

**THINK:** Reflect on times you have seen people respond negatively to Jesus. Why did they respond that way? What was it about their background or their experiences that



gave them a negative response? How can you empathize with them? How can you show them a positive view of Jesus from your own life that may help them see Him differently? How can you talk to them about Jesus in a way that is positive and draws them in?

**PRAY** for the world to respond to Jesus in the right way. Pray for those who have a negative view of Jesus to have a shift in their understanding. Pray for those who have had a negative experience with church. Pray that positive Christians will come into their lives to share the truth of the Gospel with them. Pray for yourself to have the words to say to share a positive view of Jesus with the world.

**ACT:** Share the person of Jesus. This week talk to someone about Jesus as a person you love and want to follow. Don't talk about the rules of Christianity or even the Gospel of salvation unless talking about Jesus leads him or her to ask how to come to know Him. For now, just start by sharing who Jesus is and the difference it has made in your life to walk in relationship with Him, specifically focusing on the freedom, joy, peace and rest it brings.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2015/01/12/375663920/the-doctor-who-championed-hand-washing-and-saved-women-s-lives>

<sup>2</sup> Jerome Neyrey, *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew* (Westminster/John Knox Press, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> C. S. Lewis, "What Are We to Make of Jesus Christ?" *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology* (Collins, 1979).