

Mark 3:1-6 - Why do good people hate Jesus?

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. Our reading is from Mark chapter 3, verse 1 to 19. And it's on, if you have the church Bible, it's 1004. I think it should appear on the screen there.

Amen. Another time, Jesus went into the synagogue and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, stand up in front of everyone.

Then Jesus asked them, which is lawful on the Sabbath, to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?

But they remained silent. He looked around at them in anger and deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, stretch out your hand. He stretched it out and his hand was completely restored.

[1 : 16] Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus. Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the lake and a large crowd from Galilee followed.

When they heard all he was doing, many people came to him from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, and the regions across the Jordan and around Tyre and Sidon.

Because of the crowd, he told the disciples to have a small boat ready for him to keep the people from crowding him. For he had healed many, so that those with diseases were pushing forward to touch him.

Whenever the impure spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, You are the Son of God. But he gave them strict orders not to tell others about him.

Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted. Jesus went up on a mountainside and said, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James, son of Alphaeus, Thaddeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

[3 : 02] May the Lord help us to understand his word. Thank you so much, Lucia. If you want to keep that passage open in front of you, we're going to be having a look at that together. I'm going to pray for us just now and ask for the Lord's help.

Lord, we do pray, just like Lucia said, that you might help us now. We want to ask that you might help us to understand your word. But not just with our heads, but Lord, we want to understand and obey with our hearts and our lives.

So please be at work by your spirit for the sake of your glory. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. My intention this morning is to focus mostly on verses 1 to 6 of chapter 3.

We're going to pick up some of the other bits next week. And the reason for that is that verses 1 to 6 of chapter 3 are really the conclusion of five conflict situations that Jesus has been in.

So just flick back and I'll show them to you in chapter 2, verses 1 to 12. Jesus is in a conflict over his ability to forgive sin. Are you really able to do that?

[4 : 15] That's the conflict, isn't it? In verses 13 to 17 in chapter 2, there's a conflict over the kind of people that Jesus is hanging around with. He's hanging around with tax collectors and sinners.

In verses 18 to 22, there's conflict over fasting and why his disciples are not doing it. And then in verses 23 to 28 of chapter 2, there's a conflict over picking corn on the Sabbath.

And now in chapter 3, verses 1 to 6, there is conflict over healing on the Sabbath. Now, it's worth you just noticing, and me pointing out to you if you hadn't thought about this, that those events did not happen sequentially.

Mark is not writing it as if you assume that this happened on day 1 and then day 2, 3, 4 and 5. No, Mark is actually arranging his material in the gospel to make a point to you and to me.

I know we've said this before in our studies in Mark's gospel, but Mark is a preacher, not just a writer. So he has a point to make.

[5 : 22] He has something to say to you and to me. And he knows that we are slow to listen and hard of hearing. So he writes it and emphasizes it in really obvious ways. Five times he tells you that Jesus ends in situations of conflict.

Why does he put that together? What does he want you and me to notice? Well, I think he wants you to see, he wants me to notice, that Jesus is controversial.

Jesus is opposed. Not everybody loves Jesus in the first century. So much so that despite all the great things that Jesus is doing, despite his incredible compassion and kindness, despite the fact that he feeds the hungry, that he heals the sick, that he casts out demons, still despite all of that, people hate him.

In fact, as we get to the end of the gospel, the truth is that everybody deserts him. It's interesting, isn't it? Let me just ask you to think about that.

I wonder whether you've ever thought about it. It's strange, isn't it? I think if you were to ask most people today how they felt about Jesus, what they thought about Jesus, maybe if you plucked up the courage to do that thing you're not supposed to do in London, and you spoke to the person on the tube next to you or on the bus, and you said, hey, odd question, but let me ask it to you anyway.

[6 : 43] What do you think about Jesus? They'd probably say, oh, I've never really thought about it, really. I'm kind of ambivalent, they must say. I don't really have an opinion. I'm not really considered it any depth.

Well, what's fascinating in Mark's gospel is there's not much of that in the first century. No one sort of thought that Jesus was kind of an interesting character, but you weren't really interested in finding out any more detail, kind of ambivalent about him.

No one was like that, were they? Actually, some people did follow Jesus, we've been seeing that, but in the end, everyone deserts him and abandons him because hatred for Jesus wins the day.

They shout out, crucify him, crucify him. Now, the thing that I want us to think of this morning is, why is that? Why does Jesus provoke such a strong reaction from the people of his day?

I want us to ask the question, why do people, even apparently good people, religious people, people that people respect, why do those people hate Jesus so much?

[7 : 47] And you're given a big clue, aren't you, in verse 2. Look at verse 2. Some of them, that is some of those in the synagogue, were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus. So they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath.

Notice what's going on here. They are looking for a reason to get him. They want to accuse Jesus. That's what's going on, isn't it? In other words, this is not Jesus does something wrong, so then they accuse him. No, it's not that at all, is it? It's the other way around. This is a rigged game.

Jesus enters into a corrupt jury who have already decided the verdict before he's opened his mouth. They are looking for an opportunity to get him, to accuse him. He's guilty before he's done anything.

This, I think, is earth-shattering. And get this with me, if you will. Mark's claim is this. And it's not just here. It actually comes a number of times in the Gospel.

[8 : 47] Mark's claim is that when people encounter Jesus, they have a predisposition towards hating him. In other words, the Lord Jesus, God the Son in human flesh, enters into the world that he has made, and the world that he has made hates him before he even gets there.

And what's going on in Mark 3 is that they're trying to justify that response to Jesus. I don't know whether you've seen this, but this is the way that we work in lots of different areas as people, isn't it?

You know, I know we like to think that we're kind of really rational people who weigh up evidence and then make carefully considered decisions. But the reality is that actually we live our life out of our guts, don't we?

Or our hearts. There's a guy called Jonathan Haidt. He's not a Christian. He wrote an influential book recently called *The Righteous Mind*. I don't know whether any of you have come across that. And he has an illustration of how this works. He talks about an elephant and its rider. Now, of course, you can imagine, even if you've not done it, if you've ever ridden an elephant, you will know that when you ride an elephant, the dynamic is that the elephant is in charge and you're just sitting there.

[10:08] Yeah, that's the point. You know, that small stick that you might have in your hand or that little piece of rope isn't really going to do anything if the elephant decides that it wants to go in one particular direction and you would quite like to go in the other.

But, of course, although that is obviously true, the rider of an elephant really doesn't want to accept that. Yeah? The rider of the elephant wants to imagine that they're in charge.

So they say, oh, no. You know, I can pull the nose of the elephant by five degrees and they will go in the direction that I want them to. And the rider of the elephant will explain to you afterwards how the elephant followed every single instruction that they gave it.

But, of course, it's not true. It's rubbish, isn't it? Jonathan Haidt's point in his book is that the elephant is really like our guts and our intuition. And the rider is like our minds and our reason. And while we love to think that our mind and our reason is in charge, actually what really is going on in our life in so many different areas is that we are living out of our kind of gut response, our instinctive reaction, and then our reason comes in afterwards and tries to justify it.

[11:18] Now, like I said, he's not a Christian, but he's stumbled into Bible truth because the Bible consistently tells us that when it comes to Jesus, when it comes to knowing God, it's our gut moral response that governs the day.

That you and I are morally hardwired people looking for explanations for what we choose to do or not do. Looking for reasons to justify it.

And that's Mark's point here. That people confronted with incredible evidence as to the existence of God. Jesus is literally welcoming anybody and healing them, casting out demons, doing good.

They are confronted with irrefutable evidence of the person of Jesus Christ. And what do they do? They hate him. They hate him.

And they look back for a reason for it. If you want to put it back into the illustration, we are, if you like, elephant-wired to hate Christ. And our rider minds are just looking for explanations.

[12:23] There's more to say from the passage. We're going to come on and say it. But I want just to pause here, really, if I can. Because I want to know that you've reckoned with this. Just listen to this and hear this.

Perhaps you're here this morning. You're not sure whether you're a Christian. And you think, just listen. This is just a bit too harsh, Steve. I don't hate Jesus. I feel like you're putting words into my mouth which aren't really true of me.

You know what? Okay, I probably don't follow him very closely. I'll give you that. I know that I don't really kind of pay too much careful attention to him. I know the stories. I think he's important.

But I don't hate him. Listen, if this is how you're thinking this morning, can I say that two things are possibly true this morning? One might be that you've never really thought about it before, right?

If this kind of ambivalence is how you feel about Jesus, perhaps you've never really met him.

Because those who met him didn't feel like that. Those who encountered him actually, no, they had a gut response towards Jesus.

[13:30] Or maybe this other thing is possible too, right? It might be that you've met him and you hate him.

But you're just doing that really nice 21st century thing of passive aggression rather than outright aggression. I mean, we're way too sophisticated, aren't we? We just throw stones at people.

Who does that? Yeah? No, I'm just going to pretend I'm interested in Jesus and actually get on with my own life. That's how I'm going to keep Jesus at arm's length. And that's the same moral gut reaction, isn't it?

Passive aggression. Mark says our response to Jesus is instinctive more than it is rational. And as we begin to understand that Jesus is God in flesh, as we begin to see that Jesus is King and Lord, that Jesus, far from just being an interesting person of history, Jesus has the right to look you in the eye this morning and say, you must follow me.

You must do what I say. You need me and you must listen to me. Nobody gets to say that to me. I get to do what I want to do.

[14:42] And our gut reaction says, oh, put him at arm's length. Of course, it also means, doesn't it, if you're a Christian this morning, by implication, Mark wants you to know that you're not a Christian this morning because you're better than anybody else and you worked it out and they didn't, right?

No, you're a Christian this morning. Because God, in an act of grace, swapped your elephant for a different one that loves him, wants to follow him and wants to trust him.

Now, in a sense, that's really the big idea. That's the big message of these opening verses of chapter three. But I want us to dig in a bit more detail because I want us to see that there is a sort of a deeper reason or an additional reason or additional explanation to this hatred for Jesus.

Because I want us to see that we are hardwired to hate Jesus because Jesus exposes something about us which we really don't want to accept. Look back at the story with me and you can see that the conflict is centered on what is permitted or not permitted on the Sabbath, which is why we went there with the children earlier.

In verse two, they're looking to see what Jesus will do because they have a suspicion that Jesus cares rather little for their particular Sabbath rules. This is their chance to get him.

[16:01] And in verse three, Jesus makes a man with a shriveled hand stand in the middle of the synagogue. In the synagogue, the seats would have been around the edge and he pulls him up to the middle. You can sort of picture the scene, can't you?

And then in verse four, if you look down at it, Jesus invites the synagogue into a debate. He says, which is lawful? Historians tell you that that is a kind of rote phrase in synagogue debates.

It would have been an introduction to come and join in a conversation about what is right or what is wrong. They love that kind of debate normally, but here when Jesus asks it, they're not interested. Now, of course, this has been building in the previous sections. What's useful to bear in mind is that while remembering the Sabbath day and keeping it holy was the fourth of the Ten Commandments of the Old Testament, that the Jews of the day had added a whole series of other laws or rules around it, which they assumed prevented people from breaking that particular command.

It's like they built the fences around it and said, well, if we keep these rules, then we definitely won't break that rule in the middle of it. So even though the law didn't say anything about healing a man with a shriveled hand on a Sabbath, still the leaders of the day had a rule that you were only able to treat life-threatening conditions.

[17:18] Of course, this is not one of those. So Jesus challenges them and he says, which, verse four, which is lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?

Now, notice what Jesus has done here. He's very clever, isn't he? He switched out their categories. He doesn't ask them, which is probably what they were expecting.

He doesn't say, is it lawful to treat a non-life-threatening disease on a Sabbath? That's not what he asks. He says, is it right to do evil or to do good, to save life or to kill?

Because Jesus' implication is that the evil thing would be not to heal the man when he could. That would be a good undone, right?

A good thing undone. So he pictures the question saying, should I do the evil thing on the Sabbath of allowing this man to leave with a shriveled hand? Of course, the people remain silent.

[18:16] There's no answer. And Jesus heals the man. Now, you might read this and perhaps you've read this account before and think, well, this is a sort of interesting debate between religious leaders of the day.

They're kind of clashing with Jesus over one of these interpretations of the law. This might be interesting to you if you're a theologian or you're a nerd. And most of the rest of us, we can just leave it there and move on.

We've heard what has got to be said. But that doesn't explain verse 6, does it? Look at verse 6.

Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.

I don't know whether you've had any of those sort of nerdy conversations with your friends where you're disagreeing over a particular point of interest, over something that you know about. You don't often go away wanting to kill the other person, do you?

No, there's a depth here, isn't there? So what's going on? I think there's something else going on here. Just notice Jesus' premise, or at least the implication of his question.

[19:23] Notice that Jesus basically says, keeping your rules is evil and kills people, right? In other words, fulfilling your assumptions would involve me becoming evil and taking life.

Well, that's pretty serious, isn't it? In other words, Jesus says, your assumption, right? Your belief that you can keep the law and be saved by it, if only you keep these laws which are fencing in the laws in the middle.

Your assumption that if you do that, you will live. That is evil and it kills people. That's what he's saying. This is crucial, right?

If you miss this, none of this is going to make any sense. Do whatever you have to do to try and stay with me and grapple with this for a moment. Listen, the assumption of the Jewish leaders here, this is all of our assumption by nature really as well.

But we might not have the same rules, but it's our same assumption. Their assumption is, listen, if you keep the rules, you will be saved by the rules. Yeah? Do what God asks of you to do and God will save you.

[20 : 34] Yeah? It's the do good, get good, be bad, get bad, right? If you don't keep the rules, God will send you to hell. If you keep the rules and are good, God will save you because he'll be kind to you.

He's nice. He's like that. Now, some of us, we have that kind of philosophy and we think we're rather good at it. See, we're the smug people, right? We're the people who think we're winning.

Yeah? Oh, yes, I know it's about keeping the rules and I'm rather good at that.

Look at me, right? Others of us feel like failures because we're actually more honest than the smug people and we know that we don't keep the rules. And so we come to church, we feel crushed. How could God save me?

I can't keep the rules. I can't keep the rules. Now, that's what's going on here. The Jews thought and applied the Ten Commandments like this is a sort of 10-step program to being saved by God. You know, obey these rules and God will have to save you. You'll twist his arm. He'll be persuaded that you have enough moral cash to get into glory. Be moral and God will owe you and pay out when you die.

[21 : 36] And Jesus says, listen, that whole way of thinking, that instinct that you have about what life is about, that is wrong.

More than wrong. It's evil and it kills people. That's his diagnosis. You see, really, Jesus is more like a doctor and he says, listen, the Ten Commandments are meant there to expose the disease, not to give you the cure.

Imagine it like this. Imagine that a doctor comes in to see a patient who is dying of heart disease. Their heart is terribly diseased.

They are going to die. They're beyond any hope and in need of a heart transplant, which they're resisting. Now, the doctor decides that what he's going to do is he's going to come and show him a picture of his heart and a picture of a healthy heart.

Now, why would the doctor show the patient a picture of a healthy heart? Can you imagine, right? Maybe you're the person with heart disease and you're lying there and the doctor comes in and shows you a picture of a healthy heart.

[22 : 57] Imagine he does that and says, well, this is what I want you to do. I want you to get your heart to look like that, please. Because if your heart looks like that, you're going to live. Could you just kind of get out of the bed and start doing something to make your heart look like that?

Of course, the doctor is not showing you the picture of a healthy heart to make you do that, is he? That would be an incredible cruelty. No, the doctor is showing you a picture of a healthy heart to demonstrate to you how much peril you're in and that you need a heart transplant from the doctor. And Jesus says that's what the law is there to do, is to expose you and me and the Jews here as lawbreakers who need salvation. Listen, let me show to you, says Jesus, just how corrupt and broken and in need of salvation you are.

And to assume, to assume that you can look at the picture of a healthy heart and go, yeah, I can do that. That is evil. And it will kill you. So have we considered that for ourselves?

The commandments given by the Old Testament in the Ten Commandments, which are written on our hearts, aren't they? It's like our conscience. That they are there to show you that for all the efforts that we make, we are actually lawbreakers, not lawkeepers.

[24 : 20] And this Sabbath rest one is a really exposing one, isn't it? You know, that desire that I have, that you have to work all the time, as if our own efforts were the driving force of the universe.

Your boss might love it, but it will kill you in the end. You know, that desire that we have for selfish sexual pleasure outside of the marriage of one man to one woman.

It's not a desire to guide you or give you an identity. It's an evil that will kill you. That desire to earn God's favor that we might spend it on our pleasure, assuming somehow that religious observance

puts God in our debt.

That's not spirituality, that's idolatry, says the Ten Commandments. It's being corrupt. You see, here's the point. This is why people, especially religious people, especially good people who think they're good people, why people like that hate Jesus?

It's because Jesus says, rule keeping will send you to hell. Jesus says, our problem is deeper. It's more serious.

[25 : 25] It's more dangerous than anything that you could cure by your good works. And we find that just a really hard diagnosis to accept. And the truth is, it's not just that we find it a hard diagnosis to accept.

If Mark is right, we'd rather try and kill the doctor than accept his diagnosis. Can I just ask you this morning whether you've taken this seriously?

That unless you've really understood that Jesus has something really difficult to say about the state of my soul and the state of yours, unless we've actually acknowledged that we've never really heard Jesus, we've never really heard what he's got to say.

If your impression of Jesus is that he's just a kind of buddy who's going to come alongside you and help you in your goals for life, you've really not listened to him. Jesus is a bulldozer to your self-righteousness.

And if you won't believe what he says about you, you won't respond to him in the way that you're supposed to. You know, I don't know how about you, but I kind of read stories like this in Mark's Gospel, and I find them a little difficult to relate to.

[26 : 30] I mean, I find it hard to imagine being bothered about what people do or don't do on a certain day. But the truth is that you could read this sort of in a more contemporary way, couldn't you?

That knowing that Jesus isn't impressed with the sorts of things that we're impressed with today as well. You know, the truth is that Jesus is not impressed with the self-confident religious beliefs of our day either.

I know you know this, but Jesus doesn't follow you on Instagram. He's not impressed by how many followers you have. Jesus is not inclined to give you access to glory because of your end-of-year bonus at work.

You know, he's not moved by the number of people who know your name or who speak well of you. He's not going to offer to save you because you went to Sunday school as a child, your parents took you.

He's not going to save you because you say, oh, this was my home church, I went to West Kilburn. He's not going to save you because you weren't as bad as other people.

[27 : 32] You resisted gang crime or you stayed sober. Surely I don't need to tell you that he's not intimidated by the size of our muscles. He's not double tapping your gym pictures like other people might be.

He doesn't envy your morning routine. Instead, Jesus says he looks us in the eye as a compassionate doctor. He looks you in the eye and he says, listen, I've got some bad news for you. You're a sinner. You need a savior. And it's me, says Jesus.

And either you choose to hate him for his bluntness like the religious Jews of Mark 3, or you bow your knee to him and say, please save me. Now we're nearly finished, but there's just something else I want you to notice in the passage before we do.

And it's that it's not just the religious leaders who have strong emotions, is it? If you look at verse 5, you notice Jesus has strong emotions as well. He looked around them in anger and deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, stretch out your hand.

[28 : 40] He stretched it out and his hand was completely restored. So you notice this, as much as people hate Jesus, Jesus hates lostness, doesn't he? I think that's what's going on here.

The anger is as he looks around at this system of self-confident rule keeping, that the diagnosis has been mistaken for a cure. And Jesus is incensed at the idea that God could be bought off by good behavior.

It makes Jesus righteously angry, right? Legalism, self-reliance, self-righteousness, things that think they can twist the arm of God and tell God what to do, that really ticks Jesus off.

But at the same time as that righteous anger, he is also, we're told, deeply distressed. Literally, he's grieved with sorrow. Jesus is heartbroken here. At what? It's the stubborn unwillingness to listen to

what he's got to say.

You see, Jesus' intention of verse 4 is not to stir up the hatred of the crowd, but it's to reach out and save them. His diagnosis is not cruel. It comes from a heart of love, the one who's able to save.

[29 : 49] We've got to reckon with this about Jesus. He says some really difficult things, but he doesn't say it in a way that's unmoved. Jesus longs to save. He is reaching out to you this morning in love.

He doesn't look at our foolish self-confidence and go, well, you know, they'll learn. It's not like that at all. No, he's angry at the school of thought that has led us down that line.

And he looks at us with heartbroken compassion and weeps over the stubbornness of our hearts to accept his diagnosis and come to him for the cure. Jesus' emotion in the passage is as strong as anybody else's, but it's just in the right direction.

He's right to be angry with the hollow self-confidence of our time. We are wrong to reject his diagnosis. He loves to save. He's delighted with repentance. He's eager to heal the sinner and rescue the broken, but he's grieved at ambivalent, cold-hearted people who pass him by in the streets.

Or cold-hearted people who spend their Sundays sitting in pews and go and live as if he doesn't exist. Imagine it like this as we close.

[31 : 00] Imagine that your hometown, wherever that is, you get a message back to hear that your hometown has been taken over by a deadly disease. That the water in your hometown is infected and everyone has come down with this life-threatening condition.

But you have the cure. It's an injection and the disease is cured. And so you load your car and your box full of these vaccinations and you drive to your hometown thinking, I've come here to save them.

They're in deadly danger at this disease which is coming through the water. And I've got the cure.

They're going to love to hear me. But when you arrive home, you realize that the residents of the city think that drinking the water is the cure to the disease that is born by the water.

They're kind of lost in this way of thinking. So they have parties where they come together to drink the water. They go to conventions and they pour it out in front of one another and drink it down, even though it's giving them this disease which is killing them.

The graveyards are full. So you stand up and speak. Say, listen, the water's bad. The water's killing you. Don't drink the water.

[32 : 18] Come to me. I've got a cure here. And they say, don't you dare come tread on our water drinking parties. We love it. We've got the finest water in the land.

How then do you feel about your hometown? Well, you're utterly heartbroken, aren't you? Come with the cure and they're not interested. They don't want it.

And you're shocked at the stubbornness of the hearts that just keep taking in the disease instead of wanting the cure. That's Jesus in Mark 3.

He has come from the glories of heaven as the savior with the cure for our law-breaking sin. And he presents it to us this morning and says, come.

I'm the doctor for the sick, for the sinful and the needy. Come to me and I will heal you. Oh, Jesus, I'm not. I'm not diseased. I don't need it.

[33 : 17] I'm probably all right on my own. Thank you very much. I like you. You're a nice guy, but on you go. I don't know. And Jesus is heartbroken at our stubbornness.

Can I ask you this morning, if you've never come to Christ, come to him this morning and trust in him, will you? He's reaching out to you.

He says he can take your sin and bear its punishment on the cross and grant you a new heart, a new elephant, if you like, that loves him and lives for him. And I know many of you in this room became Christians like that a long time ago.

But let me say to you, chapter 2, verse 17 is still as true of you as it is of the person who's just trusted Christ. Jesus says to them, it's not the healthy who need a doctor, but those who are ill. I've not come to call the righteous, but sinners. Jesus is my savior and he loves me and has saved me. Praise his name.

[34 : 17] Let's have a moment of quiet just for us to pray in our hearts. Then I will pray and then we'll stand and sing together. Dear Lord Jesus, thank you that you love us.

Thank you that you've come to save us. Thank you that you're the doctor for our disease. Thank you that you paid the price for our sin on the cross.
Forgive us, we pray, for stubborn hearts that love themselves more than you. Forgive us that even this morning as Christians, we are tempted to trust our own efforts and not yours.
Have mercy on us, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.