

Expecting rejection Mark 6:1-13

I am not a serious runner.

When I was about 7 I was fairly quick. But now at the grand old age of 42 I've slowed down a little and my running has turned into short jogs along the sea front. I do this so can keep on eating **chips** and **chocolate** as part of **a healthy diet**.

One of the things I've noticed on my jogs is that there are always lots more people out running in the summer than in the winter. Head down to North Bay in December when it's cold and wet and you will have the promenade all to yourself. But if you head down in July when the sun is shining and the temperature is in double digits then you will see many more people in lycra huffing and puffing along.

We all know why. Whether it's running or golf or cycling or walking or parenting or work or whatever. **When the conditions are easier, it is easier to be motivated**.

This is also true for the mission that Jesus has given his followers.

Whatever our role in the world, whatever status we have, wherever God has placed us, it doesn't matter. Jesus says **all** of his followers have **the same significant responsibility**. To share the good news that Jesus has died and rose again to be the Saviour of the world **and** to invite those around us to put their faith in him.

At the moment **this is a tough mission in the UK**. We know that Christians in this country are not experiencing the same hostility and violent persecution that many of our sisters and brothers are facing in other parts of the world. We're not being killed for our faith, we're not being beaten and we're not being put into prison. However, this doesn't mean it's easy to speak about Jesus in the UK.

At the moment we are faced with what I'd call an **apathetic majority** and an **aggressive minority**.

The truth is that we do have a small number of people who are **aggressively against** the Christian faith. In their eyes it is too exclusive and too intolerant of the lifestyle choices of others. And as a result they want to see historic Christianity marginalised and even banned. We need to be aware of this and we need to prayerfully support organisations like the Christian Institute who are leading the fightback so that Christianity is properly seen as the inclusive and tolerant religion it really is.

However, most of the people we'll meet won't be aggressive. No, they'll be **apathetic**. They won't mind us believing what we do and they won't mind us getting involved in a range of church activities, as long as we don't take it too seriously. But they won't be interested. They won't be keen to learn and they won't be keen to join in.

Sharing the good news about Jesus with the apathetic can be **daunting, disorientating** and **demoralising**. It can result in us giving up altogether.

Which means that we will need regular **encouragement** to keep on going in this vital task. This is what I want to do this morning from this section of **Mark chapter 6**.

First of all, I want to show us why loads of people aren't interested in Jesus. **Then** I want to show us how we should respond.

First of all, why are loads of people in the UK so apathetic about Jesus?

Look at verse 1. **Read verses 1 to 2a**.

I'm aware that not all religious teaching keeps people on the edge of their seat. But Jesus' teaching was different. When he opened his mouth people were captivated. They were gripped by his **insight**, his **wisdom** and his **authority**. As a result, they were often left **amazed**.

We've got to be careful that we don't equate amazement with faith.

Someone can stop you in your tracks but this doesn't mean you follow them down the road.

What about Jesus when he returns home? Do they welcome him as a celebrity? Do they cheer him in the streets? Do they put one of those blue plagues on the wall of his house?

Listen to how verse 2 continues. This is what the people says. **Read verses 2b to 3.**

I love asking questions. Often when people ask me questions my first response is to ask them a question in return – which I'm not sure everyone likes 😊 But I love asking questions. They help discover what a person is really thinking and can reveal what is driving a person's life. So I ask them all the time.

What are we to make of the questions in verses 2 and 3? In a very short section we are confronted with **not just one question but with 6!**

As a response to Jesus' teaching the people of Nazareth start asking questions.

The first three are pretty good. They seem intrigued by what he is doing. They are struck by his wisdom. And they are dazzled by his miracles.

But then something really bad happens in **verse 3**. Did you see it? At this point they begin to answer their own questions from a position of **biased prejudice**.

They say things like, "Is this the carpenter?" And Mary's son? And he's the brother of all the ordinary people we already know. So he can't be that special can he?

It's a devastating turn of events. Their **inbuilt prejudice** prevents them from discovering the truth about who Jesus is and what he can do. They don't find out for themselves. They keep their distance. And they rely on their opinions and what they have already concluded must be the case.

But the result is sobering. Listen to what we're told in verse 5 happened as a result of their cynical attitude. **Read verses 5 and 6.**

It's not so much could not but would not.

Faith in Jesus is critical to receive the blessings of what Jesus can offer. Which means that the absence of faith results in salvation benefits being withheld from those who are within an inch of receiving them.

It seems to me that the majority of the UK population are like the residents of the ancient town of Nazareth. They have an apathy which is fuelled by internal prejudice.

In this country we are raised to think that Jesus isn't for us. He might be for a few people who need an extra crutch in life but he certainly isn't for the majority. The message we get from an early age is that Jesus is boring, irrelevant and probably didn't do most of the things written about him in the Bible.

When we start digging into the claims of Jesus we discover that our inbuilt prejudice is wrong. Jesus is far from boring, irrelevant and full of made up stories. In fact, the opposite is true. He is infinitely interesting, completely relevant and full of truth.

As you listen this morning, how would you describe yourself? **Are you apathetic about the claims of Jesus? Indeed, is there some prejudice stopping you from getting closer to Jesus to find out the truth?**

If you're a Christian we are faced with a challenge, **how should we communicate the gospel in a country full of apathetic prejudiced people?**

One temptation is give up and keep our heads down. There is nothing that crushes the spirit more than constant rejection.

We still keep the faith but over time we end up keeping it to ourselves.

Another temptation is **to only pray for revival.** We see the whole odds stacked against us and we conclude that only God can make a difference. This can lead us to keep our mouths closed to those around us as we petition God to act in power.

I certainly believe we should pray more but prayer without proclamation is not a biblical strategy.

Where does this leave us?

This week I've been encouraged by what I've read in **verses 6 to 13** of Mark chapter 6.

Let me try and show you a biblical response to the presence of apathy.

Look at the second half of verse 6. **Read verses 6b to 13.**

Before we apply these verses to ourselves We've got to realise that these were instructions given to a **unique set of individuals** in a **unique set of circumstances.**

They were spoken to the 12 **during the earthly life of Jesus.** This was a unique time in the history of God's kingdom. The Messiah had arrived and this was a key time to demonstrate the identity of Jesus.

The 12 were not just disciples of Jesus. They were his apostles. They were those who had the authority to speak as if they were him and act as if they were him.

This means we can't just say, they did it and so we should do it too. There are differences between what the apostles did and what we should do.

However, there are also similarities.

Let me highlight **two lessons** that we can learn from this earthly mission of the 12.

First, let's go and find the interested people

As a response to the rejection at Nazareth Jesus heads elsewhere. He goes from village to village.

So he doesn't stay put for the rest of his ministry with the people who don't want anything to do with him.

He gives them a chance but when they clearly reject him, he doesn't invest all his time and energy in them.

No, he goes and finds other people who might be interested. He sends the 12 out to do the same.

Please don't misunderstand what I'm saying. We're not talking about cutting off contact with our friends and family members who right now are not keen on finding out more.

Not at all! Often we have to walk with apathetic relatives for many decades.

I'm not saying block their number and stop taking an interest in their lives. No, keep going in love.

However, let's be careful not to think these are the only people in the region of Scarborough who we can share the gospel with.

There are over 100,000 people in the Borough of Scarborough!

This means there will be people around us who will be keen to explore more.

I say this because God is good! He longs for people to know Jesus and because of his mercy we can believe by faith that he is preparing the hearts of people in our borough.

So let's not be completely overwhelmed by the apathy of a few. **Let's go and find those in our community who God is already opening their hearts.**

We can do this as **individuals** and as a **church**.

Second, let's trust God to provide what we need

The 12 were told to take minimum provisions. A staff, a belt, sandals and a shirt.

It's reminiscent of how the Israelites fled from their captivity in Egypt.

They were promised a bright future but how could they arrive at their destination with such meagre provisions? They had to trust God to provide.

So do we!

I certainly believe we should plan.

However, we don't need to know every detail of every step before we launch out on new or expanded ministries.

We can head off without knowing the entire route.

This is because God is in charge of everything and because he is a generously good provider.

Brothers and sisters let's be bold and brave in our pursuit of the mission of Christ.

Life is short and eternity is long. **In fact, it's been said that 99.9% of the Christian blessings are in the life to come.** So let's live for those days and let's seek to invite as many people to join us as we possibly can.

Let's pray.