

Adopting the Mind Set of Jesus

A study of the feelings of Jesus as recorded in the Gospel of Mark

We have little control over what happens around us. Our reactions to the events of life seem to reflect past experiences and our expectations. What do you feel when you visit sick people in hospital? What moves within you when you watch real poverty and misery on television? How do you react emotionally towards those Christians who do things differently from the way you normally do them? How do you feel when you find yourself hurting because of what others have done? Our emotional reactions to such circumstances expose our underlying value system. What emotions did Jesus display?

Of the gospel narratives, Mark is perhaps the one who best captures some of the emotional reactions of our Lord Jesus. These emotions, I suggest, provide a window into His heart. They show us what is important to Him and what He strongly disapproves of. They expose His value system. As we know, John Mark, the likely author of this gospel, was not one of Christ's 12 disciples. As a young man he must have lived in Jerusalem with his mother Mary (Acts 12:12, 25). He probably saw some of his Christ's miracles and enjoyed some of His teaching. He was impressed enough to run out at night to witness Jesus being arrested (Mark 14:51,52). How much of Christ's passion did this young man see before he was chased away?

Although we usually associate John Mark with Paul and his uncle Barnabas and his failure in a missionary journey, there is evidence and tradition to suggest a strong link between John Mark and the apostle Peter. When released from prison, Peter immediately went to the house of Mary, Mark's mother, where believers had gathered to pray for him. Later we find Mark with Peter in Rome, and Peter refers to him as "my son Mark" (1 Peter 5:13). The apostle Peter must have provided much of the material found in Mark's gospel, so much so, that this book was called Peter's gospel by some ancient writers. Although Peter mellowed in his latter years, his impulsive and aggressive character was very different to that of our Lord Jesus. He surely must have noticed that Christ's feelings and reactions were often at odds with his own. Christ had a different value system. Let's explore:

1. Jesus reacts to a needy world

Before Mark finishes his first chapter, a contagious, smelly leper falls before Jesus and pleads with Him “If you are willing, you can make me clean” (1:40). Living here in Colombia, a third world country with crippling unemployment, we nearly daily receive requests for financial help from one quarter or another. It is emotionally tiring. Personally I would prefer not to see so many needs. But Christ felt **compassion**. Not just enough to drop the leper a coin. He was “**filled with compassion**”. What followed was not a cold and calculated response by Jesus but a response driven by compassion: “Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man”. “I am willing” He added, “Be clean!” (1:41). Later, on His way down to the sea of Galilee, he meets “a man that was deaf and could hardly talk”. His friends begged Christ to heal him. One senses how the Lord empathised with the predicament of this deaf man and the anguish of his friends. Jesus “looked up to heaven and with a **deep sigh** said to him ‘be opened!’” (7:32-35). It is sometimes painful to live in this fallen world. Our dear Lord has also felt that.

When a group is large, and the needs even larger, we can feel numb and respond with indifference. Christ was tired. He tried to get away with his disciples to a quiet place and get some rest. They deserved it. Yet a large crowd discovered them. Could Jesus see in the crowd some faces that would later yell “crucify him”? Didn't Christ know that crowds are unreliable? Wasn't He aware that many followed out of curiosity and personal benefit? Yet what swelled in His heart on seeing the crowd? He “had **compassion** on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd” (6:31-34). He felt their spiritual and material need. When dealing with another large crowd, He explained to his disciples “I have **compassion** for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way” (8:2,3). A few months ago I lent a sister here in Armenia a commentary on Ephesians written by a Western author. After a few weeks I asked her what she thought of it. “I was discouraged by it” she said. “Why?” I asked in surprise. “It gave me the impression that our blessings are all in the heavens and promised for the next life. That Christ is not concerned that we are behind with our rent, that our bakery suppliers have cut their credits, that my son is sick in bed. We need Christ's blessing now too!” Are you currently going through a difficult patch in life? Christ knows the pain, the frustrations and the injustices of living in this fallen world. His heart swells with **compassion** as he identifies with each one of our needs.

2. Jesus reacts to spiritual bondage

The gospel of Mark is a gospel of action. It depicts Jesus on the move. But every action has a reaction. We find opposition to Christ and His work in each one of its 16 chapters, all except the prophetic chapter (13). This opposition came basically from two sources: satanic activity and the Jewish religious technocrats. In 9 chapters we have varied references to demons, evil spirits or Satan. Mark describes more demon activity than do the other gospels. We find Satan tempting Jesus, taking the word out of hard hearts and speaking through Peter. We read of evil or unclean spirits talking, shouting, shaking people, throwing one to the ground, gnashing teeth, taking away speech, making one rigid, causing violence and giving extraordinary strength. Mark makes reference to demons confined to a man (5:8), a woman (16:9), a child (9:21),

an area (5:10) and to animals (5:13). Christ expels evil spirits sometimes at a distance (7:29), sometimes face to face after dialogue with them (5:8). Some evil spirits are able to speak (1:34), some have a name and a will of their own (5:9,12).

Perhaps you are unfamiliar with all this strange and explicit evidence of Satanic bondage. Many civilised and cultured Christians have developed theological models to limit this uncomfortable phenomena to a distant past. But much of this is still evident in pagan cultures today. With the current rapid migration of third world people towards North America and Europe, I would suggest that any Christian group that seriously engages in evangelising and helping emigrants, will soon encounter similar strange activity. Only when you gain their confidence will they begin to talk about it. How does that make you feel? Motivated by a new challenge? Afraid to encounter the unknown? Angry to have your comfortable theological framework questioned? Nervous of possible personal danger? How did our Lord Jesus feel? He did not focus on himself. He did not focus on the evil spirits. He had “**mercy**” on the demon-possessed man (5:19). Christ’s ministry in freeing those in spiritual bondage did not go unnoticed. Some referred to it as a “new doctrine” or “new teaching” (1:25-27). Others who could not deny the positive effects but disliked the whole messy business claimed that Christ himself had an evil spirit (3:22,30). Yet those who lived the agony of spiritual bondage flocked to Jesus (1:32-34). With my limited experience in this area, I would suggest that **mercy** should be the driving force to get involved in these issues (not curiosity, neither a love for controversy). In fact, without a deep sense of **mercy** towards a person who evidently suffers such bondage, very few will ever attempt to get involved and help. The process of helping those in spiritual bondage find complete freedom in Christ is not always comfortable.

3. Jesus reacts to religious technocrats

We find a broad representation of Jewish religious life in this gospel. Mark mentions priests and high priests, Pharisees and Scribes, Sadusees, elders and Herodians. Each with their different theological slant, but happily united in opposing Jesus. At the beginning of the gospel the opposition is mainly theological, testing and judging Jesus on issues such as who can forgive sin (2:7), why Jesus ate with sinners (2:16), why His disciples were not fasting (2:18), and what you can and can't do on a Sabbath (2:24). One Sabbath Jesus had a sick man before Him. Would Jesus wait one day before healing him to avoid unnecessary confrontation with the strict Jews? Jesus does not deny that the Sabbath law was given by God, but referred to the reason for this law: “The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath” (2:27). Shall I heal this man now? on a Sabbath? The Jews remained silent. How did Jesus feel about the attitude of these righteous religious technocrats? Jesus “looked around at them in **anger** and, **deeply distressed** at their stubborn hearts” (3:5). These are very strong feelings. Then, right in front of their disapproving eyes, He proceeded to heal the man.

The Pharisees felt threatened by Christ's provocative behaviour. They joined the Herodians (the political wing of the religious Jews) to plot “how they might kill Jesus” (3:6). Elimination of non-compliers is a common response by frustrated religious technocrats.

The opposition increased. They began to discredit Christ's character: they accused him of being possessed by Beelzebub (3:22). These religious technocrats followed Jesus round with the God given Law in one hand and their good traditions (“we have always done it this way”) in the other hand, analysing everything Jesus did, said or allowed. One day some of Jesus' disciples began to eat without washing their hands. Of course it is a good idea to wash hands, but for the technocrats it had become a law. Mark devotes 23 verses (7:1-23) to explain Jesus' perspective that externals can never make the believer unclean. What is inside a person is what defiles him. The inside reality is always more important than the outside. Then the teachers of the law tried using prophecy to discredit Jesus: First Elijah must come. Since Elijah has not come yet, Jesus can't be the Christ (9:11,12). Then came the institutional argument: In Jerusalem they asked him “who gave you authority...?” (11:27,28). The chief priests were descendants of Aaron, a God ordained line of authority. But who is this Jesus? A freelance enthusiast? An independent guru?

Searching for evidence to judge and accuse Jesus, they asked him about divorce (10:2) and the rightness of paying taxes to a pagan Caesar (12:14). I am sure the Lord doesn't mind questions. It was their judgmental and hypocritical attitude that frustrated Him. They had made up their mind that Jesus was not the Christ, and no evidence to the contrary would change their position. Instead of being thankful and rejoicing at the feeding of the 4000, the “Pharisees came and begun to question Jesus. To test him, they asked him for a sign from heaven”. He “**sighed deeply**” and denied their request. Then Jesus “left them, got back in the boat and crossed to the other side” (8:11-13). Jesus resisted these Pharisees and then distanced himself from them. Perhaps an instructive example on how His followers should deal with persistent religious technocrats.

A legalistic mind frame is contagious. Religious technocrats pat each other on the back and thank the Lord that they are not as loose as others. It is a self righteous and comfortable club that feel a burden to go round, like the Pharisees, “testing” others. While in the boat, Jesus warned his disciples against this highly reproductive, parasitic, single-celled fungus: “Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees” (8:15). We should also take that warning seriously.

4. Jesus reacts to a sincere seeker

On leaving the region of Judea, a young man ran up to Jesus. He, like the Pharisees and Scribes also had some questions for Jesus. But his heart was different. He asked to learn not to test, judge or compete. He, like the Pharisees, had adhered to the Law since he was a boy. There was an outward keenness to obey driven by a sincere heart. Our Lord Jesus spotted that important difference. The Lord felt anger and deep distress towards the Pharisees, but as to this young man “Jesus looked at him and **loved** him”. Gently the Lord made him aware of the deficient condition of his heart: there was sincerity there but no hopelessness. His seeking lacked a needed sense of despair. His obedience to the God given outward forms had dulled his hunger for reality.

Much of the young man's security and self esteem rested on his savings, his farm, his stocks and shares, his pension plan. Sort that out, the Lord explained “then come,

follow me” (10:17-22). The message is clear: keeping rules and following traditions combined with a degree of self-sacrifice can make a person feel good about himself, but the Lord seeks something deeper. The driving passion of our heart is what really matters, and a God oriented passion is willing to give everything.

Two chapters later, Jesus has a happy encounter with a thinking Scribe. The Scribe had asked Jesus: “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?” In the dialogue that followed, it became evident that this particular Scribe was different from most of his religious friends. Behind the God given forms and externals, he acknowledged the supremacy of spiritual reality. “To love the Lord with all your heart... and to love your neighbour as yourself is more important than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices”. I am sure the Lord must have looked at him and **loved** him too as he patted him on the back and said “You are not far from the kingdom of God” (12:28-34).

Sadly, like most Pharisees, we are prone to defend and exalt externals and procedures. Structures and traditions make us feel comfortable. They provide continuity and, some may think, provide visible evidence of spirituality. Jesus warned his disciples against this rigid emphasis on externals. “Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around with flowing robes (concerned about dress codes) and greet in the market places (concerned about protocol, status, forms and expressions), and have the most important seats in the synagogues (concerned about their authority and seating arrangements - chairs or benches, circles or squares, men here, women there...) and the places of honour at banquets (concerned about their family name, their position and influence). They devour widows houses (frighten and enforce their behavioural patterns on weak households) and for show make lengthy prayers (use biblical terms and claim to act for God)” (12:38,39). The New Testament does prescribe some symbols and behavioural principles in keeping with the new life in Christ. But my dear fellow believer, let us never be satisfied with outward form, however Biblical it may be. Our ongoing passion should be that of the apostle Paul: “For my determined purpose is that I may know Him - that I may progressively become more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him, perceiving and recognising the wonders of His Person more strongly and more clearly” Philippians 3:10 (Amplified Translation). Jesus still **loves** sincere seekers.

5. Jesus reacts to a faithless generation

I wonder how Jesus must have felt about this nostalgic visit to Nazareth, his home town. Many memories and emotions must have flashed through Him as he walked passed the local well, the market place, the well known faces... On the Sabbath He entered the very familiar synagogue and began to teach. Having known Jesus since He was a boy, locals were surprised with the words Jesus spoke, His wisdom and the fact that He could even do miracles. It was difficult for them to bridge the gap between the human and the divine. They insisted in putting Jesus in their natural local setting: “Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't he Mary's son and the brother of James... aren't his sisters here with us?”. There is something similar in our current modern secular culture: we find it difficult to bridge the gap between the material and spiritual worlds. Even we Christians, especially in the educated west, have some real

problems here. We believe in the reality of the material and the spiritual worlds, but wish to keep them constantly apart. We have problems with the sphere where the material and the spiritual meet, where the visible and the invisible interact. We are happy to spend hours studying the Bible, organising doctrines, arranging prophetic charts, singing and teaching lessons from past dealings between God and man. But the reality of God interacting with us today is more difficult.

Those in Nazareth were unable to allow in their minds the possibility that their local carpenter really was the Divine Messiah. How did the Lord Jesus feel about this? In other towns, people would bring out their sick for Him to heal them. But very few did in Nazareth. We read that Jesus “was **amazed** at their lack of faith” (6:1-6). He expected something different from those who were expecting a Messiah. Jesus expected something different from those who prided themselves in worshipping the only true God, a God of miracles and wonders. Does your faith allow God to really do something in your physical world today?

In comparing Christian gatherings in Europe and Latin America, I notice that here in Latin America mid week prayer meetings are usually better attended than Bible study meetings. In Europe it is frequently the opposite. Some cultures have a deeper sense of need and a stronger desire that God should interact with their present reality. Most of the prayer requests are very clearly defined: “Lord I need a job”. “Please Lord, heal my wife”. “Yesterday I shared my faith with a friend at work, convert Him Lord”. There is a living and vibrant expectation that God will actually do something. Such prayers are contagious. Luke tells us that Jesus was **amazed** at the “great faith” of the Centurion (7:9). How does Jesus feel about our faith?

6. Jesus reacts to exclusive behaviour

We probably all have ideas of what Christianity should look like, what is acceptable and what is not. Some of our opinions and expectations are based firmly on Scripture, some are based weakly on Scripture, and some simply reflect our social background, our collective or historic likes and dislikes. In practice, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between these three. Most religious traditions have noble origins, but the great danger is to insist on them as if they were Scripture. As we have seen, the Pharisees had an acute exclusive mind set. But we humans are bent in this direction. It makes us feel secure and good knowing we are “in” while others are “out”. This exclusive behaviour comes to surface early in life: have you noticed this mean excluding behaviour among some children at school?

The disciples also had their ideas on who could do what and who could come close to Jesus. John approached Jesus with enthusiasm and told Him how he had spotted and stopped some independent person driving out demons in the name of Jesus. One gets the impression that John expected Jesus to pat him on the back and say “well done, you good and faithful servant”. Why did John stop him? “Because he was not one of us”. Jesus did not agree with John's controlling and exclusive behaviour and was quick to correct him: “Do not stop him’ Jesus said... for whoever is not against us is for us” (9:38,39).

In the next chapter we find the disciples stopping another group of people, those who were bringing their children to Jesus. In the disciples value system, happy noisy children and their enthusiastic mums were a bit of a nuisance. The disciples were enjoying the mental stimulus of Jesus' profound teachings. Who could join them? Well, the serious, the spiritual, the God fearing, the Scripture loving and teachable people. Clearly not those immature children. They can't understand theology. They are not even interested in our doctrinal debates. The only thing they want is for the person of Jesus to touch and bless them. The disciples rebuked them. How did Jesus feel about this embarrassing drama? Was He frustrated by this interruption of his discourse on divorce or agitated because he lost his line of thought? No. "When Jesus saw this, he was **indignant**". Not indignant with those wanting Him to touch and bless them, but with the disciples who wanted to exclude them. I suspect many of those listeners forgot what Jesus taught on divorce, but I am sure those families never forgot those special moments: "He took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them (10:13-16). Meeting Jesus, being with Jesus is the essence of Christianity.

7. Jesus reacts to the cost of redemption

The author of Hebrews encourages us to "fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him, endured the cross" (Hebrews 12:2). Jesus could look forward with joy to the fruit of his sufferings. Amazingly, that Divine joy is generated in redeeming odd, problematic, inconsistent people like you and me. But how did Jesus feel while facing the pain and reality of the cross? "They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, 'sit here while I pray'. He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be **deeply distressed and troubled. 'My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death'** he said to them" (14:32-34). Would Peter ever forget this scene? He had never seen Christ like this before. How many times he must have retold the story to John Mark as they travelled together.

Perhaps those of us who are brought up in Christian homes, who have heard Christ' passion story over and over again, can become senseless to the degree of pain involved. We may be tempted to reason that since Jesus is God, and God can do everything without much effort, salvation was an easily accomplished procedure. My dear fellow believer, have you ever hurt? Have you ever felt rejection? Have you been distressed, deeply distressed? This, and much more, was felt by Christ in the process of redeeming us. Just imagine for a moment Jesus Christ "**overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death**". And this was just the beginning. For you and for me He went on. This is how much He values us! Perhaps this glimpse into the heart of our blessed Saviour will help us love Him more and value more such a great salvation. "Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look around and see. Is any suffering like my suffering that was inflicted on me? Lamentations 1:12.

Conclusion

Christ has not forgotten His time on earth. “Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted” (Hebrews 2:18). We have a Lord who understands how we feel, who knows the pain of living the consequences of other people’s sin, the frustrations of living in this fallen world. Yet there is more. As we progressively follow Christ in our way of thinking (the mind of Christ), we shall also begin to experience the feelings expressed by Christ: His **compassion** towards the needy, His **mercy** towards those who suffer demonic oppression, His **love** towards sincere seekers, His **indignation** towards exclusive behaviour and perhaps even His **anger** against our own Pharisaic attitudes and practices. If we can think and feel more like Christ, we may behave more like Christ. This was the apostle Paul’s goal in ministry: “My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you.” Galatians 4:19.

Philip Nunn
Armenia, Colombia
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