

Jesus Calls the Twelve: Mark 3:7-19
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After this Sunday we'll be taking a short break from the Gospel of Mark. I plan to preach from Acts 2 next Sunday, and in our Good Friday service and on Easter Sunday. And then I won't be preaching the two Sundays after that due to my trip to Romania. Scott Kocher, one of the other elders, will be preaching on April 11th. And then George Scipione, a professor at the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary, will be preaching on April 18th.

And this is a good passage for us to be at this morning, because it marks a transitional point in Mark's Gospel. Up to this point Mark has recorded for us many of the events of Jesus' early Galilean ministry. And now he is going to give us a summary of what was happening and what would continue to happen in His ministry. That's verses 7-12. And verses 13-19 is the calling of the twelve apostles, which is, of course, a very significant event that will then characterize the rest of Jesus' ministry. We'll look at this passage under the headings, increasing fame (verses 7-12), and then making apostles (verses 13-19).

Increasing Fame (verses 7-12)

Last week we saw the increasing opposition to Jesus. Now Mark balances that by reminding us that Jesus was also experiencing increasing fame. In chapter 2 and the beginning of chapter 3 there were 5 accounts of conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders. One had to do with Jesus claiming to forgive sins, one was due to Jesus eating with tax collectors and sinners, one was about fasting, and then two of them had to do with the Sabbath. And those conflicts came to a crescendo in 3:6 with the Pharisees and Herodians plotting together how they could destroy Jesus.

There has been increasing opposition to Jesus even during the early stages of His ministry. And in light of that increasing opposition, He now decides to withdraw with His disciples to the sea. And as He does so we realize that His fame is increasing just as much as the opposition is. Verse 7 says that "a great crowd" followed. Verse 8 repeats the description—"a great crowd." Mark is emphatic, wanting us to realize the immensity of Jesus' fame.

There are three things we see about His increasing fame in these verses.

1) First, it is *diverse*.

These folks who are coming together to be near Jesus are coming from all over the region. They were from Galilee, of course, but not just from Galilee. People were coming from the area of Judea, which was to the south, and from the city of Jerusalem, and even from Idumea which was south of Judea. Idumea was 120 miles to the south of the Sea of Galilee where Jesus was at this point. They were coming also from beyond the Jordan, an area known as Perea. And also from the north, as far north as Tyre and Sidon which were located some 50 miles north of the Sea of Galilee. And it was not just a geographical diversity, but an ethnic diversity. Galilee, Judea and Jerusalem were Jewish areas. But Idumea and Perea were made up of a mix of Jews and Gentiles, and Tyre and Sidon were Gentile areas. So Jesus is attracting people from all over the region, from all different ethnicities and backgrounds. His fame is increasing and broadening across geographical lines and ethnic lines.

2) Secondly, the increasing fame is *intense*.

There is diversity among those who are coming to see Jesus. And there is also an intensity that characterizes them. So much so, in fact, that Jesus has His disciples get a boat for Him so that He can create some distance between Himself and this intense crowd. We're going to see this again at the beginning of chapter 4. He had to teach from the boat because of the large crowd gathered about Him.

Look at the rationale for the boat in our passage. 3:9-10 says, "he told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, lest they crush him, for he had healed many, so that all who had diseases pressed around him to touch him." So the intensity of the crowd was due to Jesus' healing powers. This was the main thing attracting the people to Him. They were amazed at His ability to heal, and those who were sick wanted to be healed. So they were all pressing in around Him, hoping that by touching Him they would be healed. And the crowd was so frantic and so large that it seemed Jesus would have been crushed if He didn't create some space for Himself.

3) A third thing to notice about Jesus' increasing fame is that He also draws the attention of unclean spirits. Verses 11-12 tell us, "And whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, "You are the Son of God." And he strictly ordered them not to make him known." We saw an instance of this back in 1:24, where Jesus cast out an unclean spirit. The demon said to Jesus, "I know who you are—the Holy One of God." But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, come out of him!" Then in

1:34 Jesus was at Simon and Andrew's house, and He healed many and cast out many demons. And it says, "he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him." And now in chapter 3 we learn that this was an ongoing occurrence. Unclean spirits were regularly coming to Him, and they recognized His authority over them. Even though they hated Him and opposed Him, they fell down before Him. The crowds clamored to be near Jesus mainly because of His healing powers. But the demons recognized Jesus for who He really is, and they were terrified. They understood that He is the Son of God, and they went down on their faces in front of Him.

This shows us again the authority of Jesus. And it is also a way that Mark highlights the deity of Jesus. In the midst of much confusion about Jesus' true identity, Mark, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, includes these details as a way of showing the reader who Jesus is. The Gospel of Mark opens with the words, "the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." And then God the Father gives His endorsement of Jesus at His baptism. "A voice came from heaven, 'You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased'" (1:11). But then there are also these unclean spirits who affirm this reality. As James writes in James 2:19, "even the demons believe—and shudder!" Even though they are opposed to Jesus, they know beyond the shadow of a doubt who He is, and they are very vocal about declaring that truth.

Jesus silences these demons for at least two reasons. One, this is not the way He wants to make Himself known. He is not going to allow demons to be His spokesmen. He is about to choose disciples who will be His representatives and proclaim His message, but Jesus makes it clear that these demons are *not* His representatives. He exercises His authority in silencing them.

And secondly, this is not the time for Jesus to make His identity known. To throw around titles like Son of God and the Holy One of God would only cause confusion and bring political upheaval. It would get Him killed. And it's not yet time for that.

So these are the elements of Jesus' increasing fame that we see in the summary of verses 7-12.

Making Apostles (verses 13-19)

Next, we see Jesus making apostles in verses 13-19. And there is a stark contrast between the crowds who are attracted to Jesus in a superficial way, and these apostles whom Jesus calls to Himself to be with Him and to be His appointed messengers. Let me make several observations from these verses about the making of these apostles.

1) Jesus Calls Effectually

When Jesus called the first disciples in Mark 1:16-18, we saw a vivid picture of His effectual call. The four fishermen, Simon and Andrew, James and John, all dropped their fishing nets to follow Jesus. And they did this “immediately,” the text says. Here in 3:13 it says that “he called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him.” In Luke 6:12 we learn that the previous night Jesus prayed to God the entire night. He knew God’s will. He knew which individuals He desired to be with Him. He called those individuals to Himself. And His call was effectual. They came to Him.

And for all of us here today who are disciples of Jesus, this is why we are His disciples: because He desired us to be His followers, and He called us to Himself, and that call effectually drew us to Him. We became new creatures, because He gave us new life. As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”

And, in fact, that is the image here of Jesus making these apostles. The word translated “appointed” in verse 14 and verse 16 is actually the common Greek word that means “make.” Jesus *made* the twelve. He took unqualified men and created apostles. He took this motley crew and created something that didn’t exist prior to this. Do you see the point? It’s not as though He found qualified individuals who fit the job description, and then assigned these men to the task. No, there weren’t any qualified individuals. There never were, and that’s still true today. Nobody is good enough. Nobody fits the job description. But when Jesus calls us to Himself, He creates new life within us. He makes us to be His followers, changing the very core of our being.

2) Jesus Calls the Unqualified

The second thing to notice here, which goes hand-in-hand with the point about His effectual call, is to see that He calls unqualified individuals. The four who were already mentioned in chapter 1 were fishermen. Matthew/Levi, who was mentioned in chapter 2, was a tax collector. None of them had the credentials to be religious leaders. They were not trained. They were not educated. They were not intellectuals. They were not leaders. They were not the kind of people you would expect Jesus to pick. If we were there we might have been tempted to caution Jesus against some of these choices. There’s a lot riding on this, Jesus. Don’t you want to choose some folks with a more impressive résumé? These guys are entirely unimpressive! And you’re banking the future of the church on them!?

This is such an encouragement to me, and I hope it is to you also. Jesus does not call the qualified. Instead, He calls the unqualified, those who are unimpressive, the misfits, the ordinary, and by His power He equips them and enables them to carry out His ministry.

3) Jesus Calls Twelve Apostles

Why didn't Jesus call only 4-5 apostles? That may have been more manageable. Or why didn't He call 30 or 40? That may have made the early church more effective. What's the significance of 12? Well, of course, this recalls the 12 tribes of Israel, and what Jesus is showing by this is that He has come to fulfill the promises to Israel and to reconstitute Israel. Jesus is forming anew the people of God.

Jesus has repeatedly offended the religious leaders, and this would have been yet another highly offensive action. Who does this guy think he is? He claims to forgive sins, He goes to feasts with sinners rather than fasting, He doesn't keep the Sabbath, and now He is setting Himself up as a new Israel? That's exactly what Jesus was doing. It was not a mistake that He chose 12, but a profound statement that the new people of God will be centered on Him.

4) Jesus Calls Men

What's the significance of this? Is Jesus a misogynist, a sexist, a male chauvinist? Why are there no women included in this list? First of all, let's remember that there were many women who were close followers of Jesus. Mark records some of these women in 15:40-41. This is immediately following Jesus' death on the cross. "There were also women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. When he was in Galilee, they followed him and ministered to him, and there were also many other women who came up with him to Jerusalem." Jesus was certainly not against women. He did not look down on women. He ministered to women, He welcomed women to be His followers, He befriended women, He honored women.

And He did not choose any women as apostles. Why is this? Some would suggest that Jesus was simply conforming to the patriarchal society in which He lived. But Jesus is not a conformist. In every other way He is going against the norm, He is breaking the rules, He is upsetting the status quo. So why would He conform to the culture in this regard if His real desire was to have male and female apostles?

No, Jesus intentionally and deliberately chose only male apostles. And he did so in order to uphold God's design for

manhood and womanhood which goes all the way back to creation. If you were at the marriage conference last month you heard Dr. Ware, in the first session, teach on Genesis 1-3 and the ways that we see God's design for manhood and womanhood in creation. Men and women are created equal in the sight of God, equal in essence, equal in dignity and worth and value. And at the same time we are created to have different roles in the home and in the church, as the Bible teaches us. And as much as our culture may scoff at this and ridicule it, God's design for men and women is a beautiful thing and a joyous thing.

Jesus choosing 12 men to be apostles is an important affirmation of what we see throughout the rest of the Bible about the roles of men and women. It is God's intention that men should be the preachers and the leaders in the church and that the husband should be the head of his home. Not because women are incapable of doing these things, but according to God's creation design, men are to be the leaders, the initiators, and women are to joyfully support and encourage that male leadership in the home and in the church.

5) The Purpose of Apostleship

There are two clear purposes for which Jesus made these apostles, and you can see these in verse 14. First, "so that they might be with him." There were the crowds who flocked to be near Jesus, and clamored to try to touch Him. But Jesus called these 12 men to be with Him. That is, to travel with Him, to eat with Him, to watch Him and learn from Him, to be with Him 24/7 throughout His ministry. Now, Jesus did not call these men because He was lonely. He was not just looking for travelling companions. He was looking to invest His life into their lives. He wanted to focus His ministry in this way so that after He left there would be these men who knew Him well and could take His message to the world. And, indeed, that is what happened. You can read about it in the book of Acts. Just to give one example, Acts 4 tells of Peter and John testifying before the Jewish Council, and it says in Acts 4:13, "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus." Do you see the power of Jesus' call? Do you see the power of Jesus' purpose for these men? Jesus took these uneducated, common men, and He called them to be with Him, and that changed them more radically than any education or earthly privilege ever could. He made these 12 apostles, so that they might be with Him.

Then the second purpose is to be sent out. He made them, not only to be with Him, but also that He might send them out.

And the word for “send” and the word for “apostle” is the same word in Greek. Verse 14 says that He named them apostles, (*apostolous*, the noun form, meaning messengers or sent ones). And then in the same verse that second purpose clause, that “he might send them,” (*apostellō*, the verb form, meaning to send someone out for a particular purpose). These are the successive purposes that Jesus has for these men. First, they need to be with Him. And then they will be sent out by Him. Jesus mentioned essentially the same two things when He called Simon and Andrew in 1:17. He said, “Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.” In other words, be with me, and then I will send you out.

Then, 3:14-15, there are two specific tasks for which they are sent out. First, to preach. And second, to have authority to cast out demons. And Matthew 10:1 adds, “to heal every disease and every affliction.” These are the very things Jesus has been doing. He has been preaching, telling people to repent and believe in the gospel. He has been casting out demons. He has been healing the sick. And now Jesus has chosen and made these apostles who will be with Him and then go out and do what He does. The authority that Jesus possesses, He is now going to confer upon these men as well.

6) Jesus’ Sovereign Plans

Notice at the end of the list of names that Judas is the very last one mentioned. And notice what it says about him. Of the other 11, several of them are described in different ways, but only Judas is described in terms of something he did. He was the one who betrayed Jesus. A list of the apostles appears in each of the synoptic Gospels: Matthew, Mark and Luke. And in each instance Judas is at the end of the list, and he is described as a traitor, or as the one who betrayed Jesus. There is also a list in Acts 1, and in that case the name of Judas does not appear because at that point Judas is dead and the remaining apostles are choosing a man to replace him.

Judas was the apostle who betrayed Jesus. That was the deed that defined his life. And the stunning thing to consider is that Jesus, being fully God and therefore all-knowing, was fully aware of this when He called Judas. Jesus chose Judas to be among the men who would be with Him, eating with Him, travelling with Him, throughout His ministry. When Jesus stayed up all night praying about these men, and as He went up on the mountain and called those whom He desired (verse 13), Judas was among that number. Isn’t that remarkable? Jesus chose the very man who would betray Him. And it wasn’t a mistake. It wasn’t that Judas had shown potential at the beginning and then took a tragic turn for the worse. Jesus knew exactly what was going to

happen all along. Jesus was not a victim of Judas's evil heart. Jesus was in control of what was going to happen to Him, as difficult as that was going to be.

Mark 14 records the details of the betrayal. In verses 10-11 it says, "Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. And when they heard it, they were glad and promised to give him money. And he sought an opportunity to betray him." And then in verses 43-46 it says, "And immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, 'The one I will kiss is the man. Seize him and lead him away under guard.'" And when he came, he went up to him at once and said, "Rabbi!" And he kissed him. And they laid hands on him and seized him." Jesus, in His divine omniscience, knew all of this at the time He called Judas. He desired to chose this man to be one of the twelve, knowing that he would betray Him.

One thing this illustrates is how a person can seem to be so close to Jesus without truly being converted. In this way Judas is a vivid example of the person who claims to be a follower of Christ, but then abandons Christ and thus shows that they were never truly saved. 1 John 2:19 says, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us." That's Judas, and so many others, who may appear to be with Jesus, may appear to be part of the church, but are not. And when they depart from Jesus, when they depart from the community of believers, it demonstrates that their profession of faith was a lie.

Another thing that Judas's life illustrates is the relationship of human responsibility and divine sovereignty, and the relationship of evil and divine sovereignty. Judas eagerly committed this terrible act of betrayal against the Son of God, and at the same time this was part of God's sovereign and good plan to save sinners. Jesus came to save sinners. Jesus died to save sinners. This is why He came. As Mark 10:45 states, "even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." And the many individuals who played a role in putting Jesus on the cross did so willingly and eagerly, unaware that they were acting exactly according to God's good plan. Robert Stein, in his commentary on Mark, says that in this mention of Judas being the one who betrayed Jesus, that "Mark's readers are reminded that Jesus was fully in control of his death. In all this, Judas, the Jewish leadership, and the Roman authorities

were willing but unwitting instruments in fulfilling the divine purpose.”¹

This is a great lesson for us to see that the existence of evil in the world does not cancel out God’s sovereignty. When we see bad things in the world, we can’t just say, Well God is not in control of that. And the other thing this shows us is that God’s sovereignty over all things does not cancel out human responsibility. When we read in the Bible that God is sovereign, we can’t just say, Well that must mean that we’re robots and therefore can’t be held accountable for our actions. We have to read the Bible and let the Bible be our authority rather than making our own presuppositions the authority. We have to let the Bible shape our presuppositions rather than forcing our presuppositions upon the Bible. The Bible upholds both human responsibility and God’s absolute sovereignty over all things, and therefore we must uphold both of these truths as well.

And the place where these two come together in such an astounding way is the cross of Christ. The most wicked and evil act of mankind, and the most gracious and merciful act of God, in the same event. Judas, and others, with evil intent, put to death the sinless Son of God. And Jesus, according to God’s good plan, went to His death willingly in order to redeem sinners. This is the wonder of the Gospel and the wonder of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

¹ Robert Stein, *Mark*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), page 176.