

# Calling of the apostles - Mark 3 v 7-19

Littlebourne 16th May 2021

Parallel Passages: Luke 6:12-16, Matthew 10:1-4

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We start the reading today with a sort of repeat of what we've seen in much of the previous two chapters, and it's really ramping up.

It might seem like this is a summary of the preceding sections - Jesus doesn't appear to be doing anything new, he just has an expanding audience.

Just as chapter 1 verses 14 and 15 set up the proceeding section, followed by the calling of the first disciples, the section here, chapter 3 verses 7-12 act as a setup before we see the twelve apostles called apart from Jesus' other followers.

No longer is Jesus talking only with locals, no longer is his ministry confined to Galilee, but he is now reaching people from much farther afield. We'll see next week Jesus talks to scribes from Jerusalem and later he travels beyond Galilee, but first, people come to him from far and wide:

## v7-8

*Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the sea, and a great crowd followed, from Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem and Idumea and from beyond the Jordan and from around Tyre and Sidon. When the great crowd heard all that he was doing, they came to him.*

Not the first time we've seen large crowds come to Jesus, and it won't be the last.

Mark tells us they came from all around - but he's a bit more specific than that. Galilee is where Jesus is currently, and is home to the sea that Jesus is next to. Judea and Jerusalem are to the south, Jerusalem around 70 miles away. Idumea is further south than that - it's the greek form of what in the Old Testament is called Edom.

Beyond the Jordan is eastwards and Tyre and Sidon are on the mediterranean coast, to the west and north. Mark is showing us the scope of Jesus' fame - from all directions, from hundreds of miles.

And these areas are both Jewish areas and gentile areas - Judea, Galilee are predominantly Jewish populations, whereas Tyre and Sidon are predominantly gentile. His fame was spreading to Jew and gentile alike.

And Mark says they came because they heard all that he was doing. Nobody could deny the miraculous events that were occurring around Jesus. You'll notice throughout the gospels that the opposition to Jesus is never that he was faking things or tricking people - his power is undeniable.

Equally, when people challenged Jesus, they never refute his arguments. The Pharisees we saw last week could not answer Jesus and rather than proving him wrong, they seek to have him killed. Maybe that's why Jesus withdraws to the sea of Galilee.

## v9-10

*And he told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, lest they crush him, 10 for he had healed many, so that all who had diseases pressed around him to touch him.*

So many people want to see Jesus, that he runs the risk of being crushed by them.

We won't see Jesus use the boat until chapter 4. But notice how he uses it in chapter 4 (verse 1-2):

*Again he began to teach beside the sea. And a very large crowd gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat in it on the sea, and the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. 2 And he was teaching them*

Jesus doesn't use the boat to escape the crowd - he uses it to avoid being crushed - he uses it as a platform to teach from. Jesus makes his priorities clear, that we need to listen to Jesus not just seek physical healing from him.

Verse 8 said that "the crowd heard all that he was doing", which is a bit different than hearing all that he was teaching. It seems like the crowd is interested in getting close enough for healing from Jesus. They don't really understand who it is they are coming to see.

## v11-12

*And whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, "You are the Son of God." 12 And he strictly ordered them not to make him known.*

The crowds might not have seen Jesus as he really was, but whenever the unclean spirits see Jesus, they know who it is they are seeing.

We've seen Jesus referred to as the 'Son of God' back in verse 1 of chapter 1 - the introduction to Mark's gospel. We've seen the Father speak down from heaven saying "You are my beloved Son". But we've not seen anyone else speak that way until now. What's interesting here is that these unclean spirits have a clearer picture of who Jesus really is than anyone else around.

The religious leaders and the demons both see Jesus rightly as a threat, but for different reasons. The demons rightly see who Jesus is - in the words of James 2:19:

*You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!*

So why does Jesus ask them not to speak? We've seen before in chapter 1 verse 34 that Jesus instructs the demons not to speak 'because they knew him'.

First, Jesus refused to allow the devil to determine the movement and timing of His ministry - he was revealing things step by step. In chapter 4 even the disciples Jesus has marked out as apostles will say "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" They don't yet understand who he is and Satan interfering will only complicate matters.

Second, He did not want to be identified with evil spirits. In this case not all publicity is good publicity. To be associated with demons is not something Jesus needs. Next week though, the scribes from Jerusalem will accuse Jesus of being in league with Satan.

Uneducated, common people and even demons had more sense than the religious leaders of the day. Just as we saw with the 'new wine in old wineskins' analogy two weeks ago, the religious leaders are so caught up in their own system, their own perspective, that they can't perceive as Jesus as divine. But they do perceive that Jesus is doing away with them - that he's bringing in a new system, one that renders them obsolete. Hence their counsel to destroy Jesus in verse 6.

Jesus doesn't want the demons speaking for him, so who does he want then?

## v13-15

*And he went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him. 14 And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach 15 and have authority to cast out demons.*

Notice that he calls these people - they aren't volunteers. He calls them, sets them apart from all the others in the crowds to use them specifically for a certain purpose.

Likewise, all of us, who trust in Christ, are chosen by Him. We are not all called to be apostles - but we are all chosen and set apart for Him. When Jesus calls, he doesn't ask for your CV, he doesn't evaluate you on the basis of your merits, no he accepts you in spite of your failings. As we'll see, those he chose for this special honour of apostleship were very ordinary, failed people indeed.

Why twelve?

Well, just as we saw that Jesus is fulfilling and ending the old system - the system of sacrifices, the system limited to the Jews - he is ushering in a new system.

The old system was for those that were headed up by the twelve tribes of Israel, the twelve sons of Jacob from whom all the Jews are descended. This new system is headed up by the twelve Apostles, the twelve close disciples of Jesus.

The new covenant has new leadership.

Apostle in it's most literal sense means 'one who is sent off', but it's also translated as messenger, ambassador or envoy, because the implication is that they are sent to bear a message. They are Jesus' chosen leaders, but their role is to point to him. They are ambassadors of Christ.

Their priorities are laid out in verses 14 and 15:

First they are to be with Jesus. Before they can do anything else, they need to know and understand Jesus' message, his methods and most importantly know Him.

Next, they are to be sent out to preach. They are to share Jesus with others.

Finally, they are to have authority to cast out demons. They are to exercise Jesus' authority given to them and do wondrous things - heal people and battle satan.

We see this sort of prioritisation throughout the gospels. That knowing Jesus is most important, sharing him and his teaching is next and then the signs and wonders are to authenticate or enhance the message. So too today - are we putting things in right order? We need to know Jesus as first priority before we can do anything else.

So who are they?

## v16-19

*He appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); 17 James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder); 18 Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Zealot, 19 and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.*

Kings and emperors from the time of Jesus are not as well known today as these men. And yet they are all rather ordinary.

None of them are from the religious world - none of them have any particular theological education, though obviously they are with Jesus, so they're getting it. None of them are rabbis or priests.

We've met five of these disciples so far - Simon Peter and Andrew, James and John, the four fishermen and Matthew, who we saw was known as Levi, the tax collector.

Already we have a diverse group - blue collar fishermen and a white collar tax collector, who actually might have been despised by the fishermen who he may well have been taxing.

But it's not just the professions of the people that is diverse, but the political opinions. Simon the Zealot, was maybe a part of the 'Zealots' political movement of the time. Such people so despised the Roman occupation that they fought against it. Their movement would have a leading role in the Jewish-Roman war that led to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD70. We can imagine that this Simon was not too thrilled to have tax collector Matthew the Roman collaborator in the same team.

We have four lists of the twelve apostles in scripture - Matthew, Mark, Luke and Acts all record them. And each is a little different. Each one records slightly different names for people, or includes slightly different details of their identities.

We've seen Matthew also called Levi, but there's also Thaddeus in Mark's list called Judas in other lists. Jesus gave names to some as well - he gives Simon an new name, Peter, and he nicknames James and John the Sons of Thunder.

What's clear is that Jesus has a personal relationship with these people. It's not a cold relationship, he's not a distant lecturer or a commanding officer. He's a friend, who gives nicknames.

These men often fail Jesus as well - lack of faith, lack of humilty, turning from Jesus, at various times in the gospels.

Simon Peter would deny Jesus three times before his death, and he's the leader of the group. Thomas would doubt. All the disciples would lose hope when they thought Jesus was dead for good.

These men were used of God, despite their many failings. Even Judus Iscariot.

Iscariot probably means that Judus was from Kerioth, in southern Judea. The rest of the disciples are likely from Galilee, so already Judus is an outsider. He's described as a thief and a miser in John 12 and Judus would of course go on to betray Jesus.

Why would Jesus choose a man like Judas?

Firstly, because this was God's plan. Judas had a role to play and he played it perfectly. His sin, his hypocrisy and his betrayal were all a part of God's redemptive plan.

Second, because Jesus being betrayed by someone that close to him is an illustration of how someone can look like they follow Jesus, but actually not be following Jesus at all. 2 Peter 1:10 says:

*make your calling and election sure*

We need to be aware that we are all tempted to go through the motions or appear like a disciple of Jesus and not really be listening to him or following him. Jesus says in Matthew 7 (:21):

*21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.*

Third, I think that Judus emphasises for us the personal nature of the betrayal of Jesus. Jesus was betrayed by someone he knew well and he had a friendship with. We all, in our sin, contribute to what Christ Jesus went through on the cross. Those of us that count Jesus as a friend will see our sin in that much more clarity when we realise that it is sin

against not just a distant God, but our personal saviour and friend.

But God can use such people for his purposes.

This is often how God operates. Most starkly, think about the greatest sin ever committed - the murder of God himself. Yet God uses this for his greatest act of mercy and grace. So too, God uses our weaknesses and our failings for his glory.

## Conclusion

Many came to Jesus, but few could recognise him. The twelve disciples didn't even see him as he really was yet, and didn't understand all he did, yet they were called by him.

Twelve ordinary men, called by God. Jesus starts his church with these people, these failures. He gives them the great commission, establishes his church through them. We would never have expected these to be the sort of people that changed the world forever. And the most we know of some of them is that they were the brother of someone else, or that they had a nickname.

Of course, the power that changed the world was not their own ability. Acts 4, as Peter and John have been arrested and brought before the religious authorities, shows this in verse 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.*

Just as the apostles were called by God, so are we. The apostles were called in a unique way, but we're called to do much the same things:

We're called first to know Jesus. The apostles did this face to face, but we do so differently. Second to share him with others. Not all are called like the apostles to preach, but we should all seek to share Jesus with others, as the natural outflowing of knowing him. Third to oppose evil. The apostles were given a particular supernatural power for this, we know that for we who are in Christ, Satan has no hold on us and the indwelling Holy Spirit equips us to battle our sin.

No special ability is required for this, rather we rely on the Holy Spirit for these things.

Let's end with these words from 1 Corinthians chapter 1 starting at verse 26:

*For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, 29 so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. 30 And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, 31 so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."*