

Mark 3:7-35 (PM)

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[0 : 00] When I was in college, a friend of mine would go into a toy store and he would ask the retail worker to pick out a random puzzle, pour the contents of said puzzle into a plastic bag, and then throw the box away. My friend would then spend the next six months putting the puzzle together without the big picture on the box. I've done at least two puzzles in my life and I know how difficult they are at the best of times. And without the picture as a reference for what you're doing, it can feel nearly impossible. And to the modern reader, I think reading Mark can feel like trying to do a puzzle without the big picture.

We simply lack the context that the original audience would have had. Stories like the three we just read tonight come at us so fast that we feel disoriented. We start by a lake, we end up in a hillside, and then we're back at a house. And so what I'd like to do is I'd like to try to help us put this big picture into focus tonight. And I want to do that by pointing out one key theme of the scripture. We are going to focus tonight on the call of Jesus Christ on his disciples.

And then in order to fill out that picture, or at least a part of it, maybe a corner, we're going to look at the three points. We're going to look at the context. We're going to look at the environment that the disciples are called into. We're going to look at the caller, the one who does the calling, the one who calls the disciples. And finally, we're going to look at the consequences or what happens after one is called.

But before we step into this text, would you please join me in a word of prayer? Our Father in heaven, we come here this morning in a variety of different places and stages.

Some of us are hurting. Some of us are feeling overwhelmed. And some of us may feel extreme doubts and wonder why we're even here. No matter where we are, Father, I pray that your call, your grace may grip our hearts this morning. Give us ears to hear the words of your Son, and give us hearts to believe the goodness of Jesus Christ, to behold the beauty of the King, and to ultimately become like your Son. In his name we pray. Amen.

[2 : 33] Amen. So, again, big picture. And in order to make this picture of Mark come into focus, would you open your Bibles with me and go to Mark chapter 1. And if you go to Mark chapter 1, you're going to see that Jesus bursts onto the scene. He comes in, he casts out demons, he heals lepers, he restores paralytics. We see Jesus right away do, and I mean this word in its most literal sense, we see him do extraordinarily good things. Extraordinarily good things.

But the religiously powerful don't respond well to Jesus. Instead of praise, they accuse. And so going back a chapter in 2.16, the religiously powerful imply Jesus is gluttonous because he eats with sinners. And then they see that he doesn't fast, so they imply that he's lawless.

And then in 3.6, they decide they've had enough, and they decide his life is worthless. They decide that Jesus is better off dead. So the powerful want to kill Jesus.

Then step with me into my text this evening in verse 7, and there we encounter the crowds. And these are Gentiles, Jews, people coming from all over. But here's the thing, as you read Mark, you realize that crowds are ambiguous at best. They're not always coming to simply follow Jesus.

You see, verse 9 tells us that Jesus needed a boat, otherwise he'd be crushed. Now, I don't know if any of you have ever been or ever seen the chaos of a store opening on a Black Friday sale. But before online shopping was a thing, you'd read headlines about mobs trampling people in order to get the best deals. And I imagine something like this is happening. People want the healing hands of Jesus so much, they almost crush the person they belong to. And in another gospel, in John 6, he tells us of another time when the crowds wanted breads and they wanted miracles. And when Jesus gives them a hard teaching and makes an actual demand on them, they leave. Crowds don't always want to follow Jesus.

[4 : 56] They often want to use him. So the powerful want to kill him, the crowds want to use him. And then in verse 3, we read, quote, Now, the demons, when they call out Jesus here by name, it's not simply a confession. It's more than that. For in the ancient world, using a divinity's name was a way of trying to gain control over them.

As one pastor I know puts it, it's like being on the school ground when you're five and looking at a buddy of yours and calling him Georgie Wargy Poo. Using a name is a way of taunting or gaining control.

And so the point here is that the demons are not simply rolling over, they're punching back. And so as the same pastor I just quoted has put it, the powerful want to kill Jesus, the crowds want to use him, and hell comes out swinging.

And it's into this context that Jesus then calls the 12. And it's into this similar context and into a similar hostility that we too are called to follow Jesus.

In our own day, we see powerful people wanting Christianity done away with. We see people using Christian language in God's name to promote their own agendas. And there is a spiritual reality that the enemy hates the gospel and will do everything he can to see it fail.

[6 : 33] That is the environment and the context of Jesus' call. And we need to take that seriously if we're going to take Jesus seriously. Seriously. So the question then becomes, why would anybody want to follow Jesus into that?

Well, I believe the answer lies in the call itself, which brings me to my next point, which is the caller. We've looked at the context. Let's look at the caller. So in verse 13, we suddenly shift scenes. We go from being on the lakeside up to a mountain.

And on this mountain, Jesus calls the 12. Now, numbers such as 12 can carry a truckload of significance. You see, as an American, if you were to come up and say to me, 9-11, or four score and seven years ago, I would immediately not just know, but I would actually feel the significance of those numbers.

And the same is true of 12. 12 tribes of Israel. 12 tribes that made a covenant with God on Mount Sinai. 10 of them were lost, never heard from again.

So when Jesus goes up on a mountain to select 12 disciples, Jesus is making a very clear statement. He has come to reestablish what Israel was always supposed to be.

[7 : 54] God's kingdom. And what's more, Jesus is declaring that he is the true king. You see, this true king has authority to shut up demons. Though they hate the gospel, they have no authority.

The true king has the hands to heal and restore lepers and paralytics. Though the crowds want to use him and almost crush him, this king has compassion on them.

And though the powerful plot his demise, this king will ultimately take and use the world's hatred, evil, and sin in order to bring about forgiveness, redemption, and everlasting life.

This king has authority, is compassionate, and uses the evil and suffering of this world to fulfill God's good plan for humanity.

That's the one who calls us to follow him. Look with me also at the call itself. Look at verse 13. It says, quote, Jesus went up to the mountain and called to him, listen, those whom he desired.

[9 : 06] Desired. Did you catch that? Those he wanted. Jesus doesn't call you. He doesn't call Aaron and say, hey, Aaron, I've got a job, and I think you've got some skills that I need to use.

No. He doesn't need anything. Jesus calls you because he wants you. And this desire has defined God's call since the beginning.

If you go back to Deuteronomy in the Old Testament, chapter 7, it tells us, quote, it was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you.

But it is because the Lord loves you. Friends, the Father doesn't call us because we have the right pedigree, the right potential, or the right performance.

He calls us because he wants us. If you were to spend 10 minutes with me, you'll notice very, very quickly that my phone is filled with pictures of my daughter.

[10 : 08] And when I look at those pictures, just this side, and I almost sometimes forget that they're on there until I pull out my phone, there's an affection that wells up just right away. Don't you know that that's how God looks at you?

Don't you know that he has called you because he has affection for you? Because he wants you? When you start to understand that, you'll start to understand how attractive his call is.

And you'll start to experience how ultimately beautiful it is as well. To drive this point home, look with me at who Jesus calls in verses 17 to 19.

The list starts with Peter. Peter, a coward and a denier. And it ends with Judas, a betrayer. And in between a denier and a betrayer, we read 10 more names, two of whom have such hot tempers that Jesus actually nicknames them Sons of Thunder, one of whom has already sold out his countrymen for gold, and five of whom we never hear about or read about again.

This isn't exactly your Forbes top disciples under 30 list. But when Jesus calls you, he doesn't call you because you're worthy.

[11 : 25] He calls you because he wants you. That's grace. And look with me at what he calls the disciples to. Verse 14, he appoints them so that they might be with him, and he might send them out to preach and have authority over the demons.

When Jesus calls us, he calls us to be with him. Don't miss that. He calls us first to listen, to see, and ultimately to behold him.

Spend time with him in prayer, in the word, and in worship with other believers. Notice, these 12 disciples are a community. You have to be a community to behold Jesus. That's how you behold his grace.

And there's no requirement for that other than to come and see. Behold his grace. Savor it. And Jesus also calls so that he can send.

And he does so with the disciples and with us. He's giving them work to do, if you read it. And it's the same work that Jesus is doing. Friends, let me give you another way to think about this.

[12 : 27] In beholding Jesus, we learn to become more and more like Jesus. We learn how to love the way he loves and to do his work.

We learn how to love like Jesus because in Jesus, we no longer have to justify ourselves. We no longer have to prove ourselves. But instead, we can move about in the perfect freedom that only grace can bring.

And so in beholding Christ, we become like him. And how we live and love because everything we do is based on and geared towards his love for us.

That's the call of the king. He calls us because he desires us. He calls us to behold him. And he calls us ultimately to become like him. That calling, though, has consequences.

And that brings me to my third point. In our last story, verses 20 to 35, we see how Jesus' call reverses everything. Those who are on the inside, the scribes, his family, are now on the outside looking in.

[13 : 34] And for those who follow this call, they too must realign their priorities, their loves, and their allegiances. Now look with me how these two stories show us how everything becomes realigned.

The scribes come in and they accuse Jesus of being Beelzebul. It's another way of saying, ah, he's Satan. Notice what they don't do, however. I don't know if you've noticed this.

They don't deny that Jesus is casting out demons. They take his power as fact, but they refuse to claim, they refuse his claim to authority. They refuse to accept Jesus on his terms.

With miracles happening right in front of them, they do all sorts of mental gymnastics to deny Jesus. In some ways, it would be the equivalent of today of saying, I like Jesus as a moral teacher or as a religious revolutionary, maybe a zealot.

But he surely doesn't have a claim on my life. The evidence is before the scribes and they refuse to accept it. So Jesus responds to the scribes with a parable.

[14 : 42] Look at it with me and notice this as I read it. Jesus brings in kingdom language. Verse 24, if the kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand.

End quote. The scribes didn't mention anything about a kingdom. In fact, this is the first time in Mark we see kingdom language used since the prologue in Mark 1.15.

Why? Because Jesus is telling the scribes, he's saying, scribes, you are correct. Evil, Satan, death itself are being overthrown and it is imploding.

You are also wrong. No, this is not a civil war. This is not an inside job. No, the rightful king has come to undo the works of evil and death.

He has come to do his kingdom work and as disciples, we are called to that same kingdom. We are called to be citizens in that new kingdom. His kingdom. His kingdom, what he's come to do becomes our priority.

[15 : 49] And so any national or political allegiances we have must give way to kingdom priorities. Jesus doesn't stop there.

He doesn't say you're just citizens. He says, not only must our citizenship become realigned, but we must become spiritually realigned as well. You see, Jesus continues in verse 28 and says, all sins will be forgiven.

That's good news. That good news comes with a stark warning. Verse 29, quote, whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin.

End quote. Oh my. Friends, before any of us here get anxious about whether we may have actually committed an unforgivable sin, look at who Jesus is talking to in this passage.

Look at the context. He's rebuking the scribes. He's rebuking people who have accused him of being the devil rather than God. Blaspheming against the Holy Spirit is to persistently and willfully deny God.

[16 : 59] Blaspheming is to reject who Jesus is and what he offers. A cancer patient who refuses his diagnosis and refuses treatment will not be healed.

In the same way, blaspheming against the Holy Spirit is rejecting the medicine of God's grace. And so for many of us, while we as Christians may have doubts, we may be tempted by sin, and we may even deny Jesus in the face of overwhelming pressure.

Remember Peter? God's grace is always, always bigger. He forgives anything and everything, so long as you, as we, are willing to seek it.

We become spiritually realigned when we start to seek that grace more and more and more.

When we rely less on ourselves and more on Christ, that is spiritual realignment. So we've seen our citizenship realigned, our spiritual life realigned, and finally our family is realigned.

[18 : 11] In verse 21, we read that Jesus' family thinks he is out of his mind, so they come to seize him. Jesus, however, has other ideas and says in verse 35, For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.

Friends, let me just quickly make this point. Jesus is not disowning his family here. But he is reconstituting it. You see, again, if we go to John, and at the end of John, when Jesus is hanging up on the cross, he will look at his mother and say, John, my best friend is now your son.

And he'll look at John, and he'll say, John, my best friend. Take care of my mom. Jesus is not dismantling all family ties, but he is reworking them.

Do you know the phrase, blood is thicker than water? People usually say this to mean that family ties are more important than other connections. But the original phrase is actually, The blood of the covenant is thicker than the water of the womb.

It means the exact opposite. The bond of the new kingdom family supersedes our biological family. And this is what Jesus is doing here.

[19 : 34] Family ties are not a bad thing. They're often a great blessing. But when our biological connections start to oppose our kingdom allegiances, as Jesus' family does here, we are called to realign with the family of God as our first priority.

Friends, let me bring us to a close. Remember that puzzle image a couple minutes ago that I talked about? Well, this evening we've seen lots of little bits coming at us, lots of little stories and lots of things.

So let's zoom back out real quick and recap. What we've done is we've looked at Jesus' call on his disciples. But don't walk away thinking that I've just given facts about people who lived 2,000 years ago.

It's about Jesus' call in our lives as well. You see, as we read the Gospel of Mark, notice and watch for how different people respond differently to Jesus. Ask yourself, what's your response?

Do you want to use him? Do you want to oppose him? Or do you want to follow him? May I humbly, humbly say that if you're struggling with that question, take time to look at the caller.

[20 : 51] Do you see the beauty and the grace of Jesus in the Gospels over and over? And do you see the beauty and grace of Jesus in your lives? And if you do follow Jesus, remember the consequences.

Are your priorities, allegiances, and loves reoriented and realigned around his kingdom? Friends, these are big questions. And if you're struggling with any of these, let me just encourage you to come talk to me.

Come talk to Aaron. Come talk to a pastor. Come talk to someone. We'd love to talk to you more about it. Thank you. Thank you.