

Picture of a Follower

Mark 3:7-19

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Sometimes we imagine that famous people must be some sort of superhuman individuals. I think this is part of the reason we tend to lend credence to the opinions of celebrities on various issues—because we imagine they must be extremely smart or have superior insight. But they are actually often not that different than us. Many people are surprised to learn that famous people are just regular people, but well-known.

This morning we're going to look at a passage that records another day of Jesus healing people, and also at the listing of who He chose to be His 12 apostles. We'll see that while these men are famous, they are also not that different from us. As we unpack the contents of this account, I hope you will see how God can do extraordinary things through ordinary people, and that all He really asks of us is to follow Him.

At the Lake

We pick up today in Mark 3, where we see Jesus has left the city and returned to the countryside, but still finds enormous crowds coming to see Him.

⁷ Jesus went out to the lake with his disciples, and a large crowd followed him.

They came from all over Galilee, Judea, ⁸ Jerusalem, Idumea, from east of the Jordan River, and even from as far north as Tyre and Sidon. The news about his miracles had spread far and wide, and vast numbers of people came to see him.

⁹ Jesus instructed his disciples to have a boat ready so the crowd would not crush him. ¹⁰ He had healed many people that day, so all the sick people eagerly pushed forward to touch him. ¹¹ And whenever those possessed by evil spirits caught sight of him, the spirits would throw them to the ground in front of him shrieking, "You are the Son of God!" ¹² But Jesus sternly commanded the spirits not to reveal who he was. (Mark 3:7-12, NLT)

After Jesus' encounters with the Pharisees, He retreats with His disciples to the lake, but a large crowd followed Him. Mark tells us they came from all around, and the places he mentions paint a picture of people literally coming to Jesus from every direction. The reason the people were coming to Jesus was because they had heard about His miracles. As such, you would expect that every person who wanted a miracle came to Jesus in hopes of having Him work in them as well.

We are told that these crowds had become so large and unruly that Jesus had instructed His disciples to have a boat ready so the crowd would not crush Him. People who had traveled long distances to see Jesus and were desperate for the miracles He could perform probably weren't interested in patiently waiting their turn. It is not difficult to imagine that this large crowd started to become restless and impatient, worried that they might not get the miracle they desired if they didn't get in front of Jesus right away. It probably didn't take long before people started trying to push their way to the front.

Jesus was genuinely concerned about being crushed by the rushing crowd. So He told the disciples to get a boat ready and keep it nearby so He would have a safe means of escape should the crowd get out of hand. The boat was Jesus' getaway vehicle, kind of like how the secret service always has the presidential limousine nearby to help the president escape if needed.

As had become Jesus' custom, He healed many people that day, which of course, caused even more to clamor for Him. One of the surprising things this account tells us, however, is Jesus' interaction with evil spirits. Mark says that when the evil spirits caught sight of Jesus, they would throw the people they inhabited to the ground screaming, "You are the Son of God!" Jesus responded to these spirits by silencing them and preventing them from telling the others who He was.

Why wouldn't Jesus let the evil spirits tell people who He was? I think there are a couple of reasons Jesus would have done this.

First, it was not time for that. Jesus had a timeline of what He knew needed to take place. This is not the first time that we have seen Jesus tell people to keep quiet about Him. One of the reasons for this was surely that Jesus was already attracting plenty of attention (both good and bad), and did not need to complicate matters further by having people openly declaring that He was the Son of God (even though He was). There would come a time for that to happen, but this was not the right time.

Second, demons were not exactly the kind of endorsement He was looking for. Remember that these are evil spirits, demons, who are making these declarations. While it is fascinating to see them recognize Jesus' power and authority, allowing them to proclaim that Jesus was the Son of God probably wouldn't help His case much. Demons are not exactly thought of as trustworthy beings (with good reason!), so it made sense for Jesus to command them to remain silent.

But that raises another question...why did the demons recognize Jesus for who He was? Remember that demons are created by God and are subject to God. As such, they were likely familiar with exactly who Jesus was. They knew they could exert some measure of control over the people they inhabited, but they ultimately could not do anything unless Jesus allowed them to do so. These demons feared Jesus.

And yet, they continued to oppose Him. How can that be? How can the demons recognize Jesus' power and authority and know who He is and yet still continue to oppose Him?

Later in the New Testament, James addresses this same tendency among human beings, and says that in many ways we are even worse than the demons!

¹⁹ You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror. ²⁰ How foolish! Can't you see that faith without good deeds is useless? (James 2:19-20, NLT)

James says that sometimes we have knowledge about God, but don't act on it. James remarks that at least the demons had the good sense to tremble in terror before God. So often, we claim to believe in God and yet act as though He doesn't exist. Today, sometimes we call this "practical atheism".

One of the things that is interesting about being a pastor is that many people suddenly get uncomfortable around you when they find out that you work full-time for a church. One of the immediate responses I get from people when they find out I am a pastor is, "I believe in God." I think the idea is that they are trying to tell me I don't need to preach at them because they believe in God too. Depending on my mood and the situation, sometimes I respond simply with, "So do demons." And then I see where the conversation leads. My hope is to remind people that saying you believe in God is worthless unless that belief affects how you live.

The demons here remind us that having knowledge about Jesus is not enough. We can know all sorts of things about Jesus, we can be experts in the Bible, we can have all the outward markings of a believer, but unless that knowledge impacts our lives and causes us to live in ways that honor Him, it is worthless.

This is the challenge I extend to you today. My hope is that if you've spent much time in this church at all, then you know who Jesus is. You know He is in very nature God, and that Jesus provides the means of forgiveness for everyone who will trust in and follow Him. But simply having that knowledge is not enough. You must choose to act upon it. My hope is that today you will take stock of your life and examine your heart to see if you have just learned facts, or whether you are living your life in the light of those facts. Does knowing about Jesus cause you to follow Him, or do you continue to live how you want? The demons have plenty of knowledge about Jesus, but because they refuse to worship Him, they face destruction. The same fate awaits anyone who knows who Jesus is, but refuses to follow Him. Please ensure you are not one of those people.

The Twelve

After this event is over, Jesus retreats once more to a mountain (presumably to pray and have time alone with God), but Mark tells us that Jesus also calls twelve men to come with Him as well.

¹³ Afterward Jesus went up on a mountain and called out the ones he wanted to go with him. And they came to him. ¹⁴ Then he appointed twelve of them and called them his apostles. They were to accompany him, and he would send them out to preach, ¹⁵ giving them authority to cast out demons. ¹⁶ These are the twelve he chose: Simon (whom he named Peter), ¹⁷ James and John (the sons of Zebedee, but Jesus nicknamed them "Sons of Thunder"), ¹⁸ Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James (son of Alphaeus), Thaddaeus, Simon (the zealot), ¹⁹ Judas Iscariot (who later betrayed him). (Mark 3:13-19, NLT)

This is the first time we see the twelve described together as Jesus' apostles. We know Jesus had many followers, many who had been with Him since the beginning. In the book of Acts, after Judas killed himself, the remaining eleven apostles decided they

needed to replace Judas, so they discussed how to select a replacement. Here are the conditions they settled on,

²¹ “So now we must choose a replacement for Judas from among the men who were with us the entire time we were traveling with the Lord Jesus—²² from the time he was baptized by John until the day he was taken from us. Whoever is chosen will join us as a witness of Jesus’ resurrection.” ²³ So they nominated two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. (Acts 1:21-23, NLT)

This leads us to believe that there were apparently others besides just these twelve who were followers of Jesus from the very beginning and had traveled along with Him the whole time, just like the twelve had done. We know of at least two men (Matthias and Joseph/Barsabbas/Justus), but it seems likely there were more. We also know that there were many women who also traveled with them and were part of the group. Nonetheless, Jesus identifies these twelve and sets them apart for a specific task.

Mark says Jesus called these men His apostles. The word apostle refers to one who is sent out, and that’s what we are told Jesus did with these men. They were to follow Him, but He was also going to send them out to preach and give them the authority to cast out demons. While Jesus had many dedicated followers, He called these twelve to a specific task, and He would use them to expand and spread the ministry. Jesus would use these twelve men to ultimately change the world.

One of the things I love about *The Chosen* is the fact that they bring to life scenes that I never thought about before. One of the great scenes in the series is when Jesus tells the twelve that He is sending them out to go and preach the good news and to drive out demons. I love the way the series depicts that conversation, because it’s exactly what you would expect. Jesus told them they were going to be sent out and there is a sudden, awkward silence as they all look around at each other, both shocked and afraid. One of the disciples clarifies just to make sure that he heard correctly that Jesus was telling them to go and drive out demons...because they didn’t know how to do that. What I love about this scene is that I think it captures a reality the disciples quickly came to understand, and one we would be wise to learn as well. God does not call people because they have all the requisite skills, but rather He calls people who are willing—and then He equips them with the skills He needs them to have. We must simply be willing to answer the call.

Mark then lists the twelve men Jesus chose as his apostles. He doesn’t give us much information about them, and the rest of the scriptures don’t give us much more detail, but we do know a few things about them. I want to highlight a couple.

Simon, who Jesus named Peter. Simon is known as kind of the leader of the group, and is often the first one to speak or act. The picture we get of Simon is somewhat impulsive at times, even though he is fiercely committed to Jesus. Jesus gives him the name Peter, which means rock. Throughout his time with Jesus, Peter does not always seem

very rock-like. He even denied even knowing Jesus on the night He was betrayed. And yet, Jesus works in Peter to become a great and solid leader in the early church.

James and John, who Jesus collectively called the Sons of Thunder. Most likely, this describes their personalities. Like Peter, we get the impression these men were somewhat impulsive. Though committed to Jesus, it seems that they had little patience for those who were not. At one point they asked Jesus to call down fire on those who refused to believe. They are also notable for asking for positions of honor in Jesus' kingdom. Despite this, John later becomes known not for his thunderous attitude, but for talking passionately about Jesus' love.

Matthew was a tax collector, and most Jews would not have even considered working for Rome, as they saw doing so as an utter rejection of the Jewish faith. And so Matthew, as a tax collector would have been reviled by all good Jews and seen as a traitor. And yet, Jesus calls him to serve an equally important role as the others. He was not a second-class disciple—he stood equal with the others.

The other Simon in the group is identified as Simon the Zealot. The Zealots were a group within Judaism who staunchly defended the rights of the Jews to be their own nation. They vehemently opposed Roman rule. They also were devout in their devotion to Jewish law. Later, the Zealots would become a group who led the charge to overthrow Rome and used guerilla warfare to accomplish their goals. The idea of someone like Matthew and Simon the Zealot working together seems ridiculous.

And then there's Judas Iscariot, who later betrayed Jesus. We imagine Judas was the one who stuck out like a sore thumb among the apostles, and yet it would seem that Judas was just like the others. He surely preached the good news and drove out demons, just like the others. None of the others suspected Judas would betray Jesus. He seemed no different than them right up until the time when he did betray Jesus.

This is a very eclectic mix of people. It is not the kind of cohesive group you might expect (or desire) for a world-changing ministry. And yet, the makeup up Jesus' twelve apostles is a reminder to us that what should unite us is not the things we hold in common in our daily lives, or our political views, or our skills, or our personalities. What unites us is our faith in Jesus Christ. That one unifying trait overrules anything else that might otherwise divide us. The Church is supposed to be made up of different people from different backgrounds, with different personalities and skillsets. But we are united by our common love and faith in Jesus Christ.

Jesus chose these twelve because that is how He chose to work in the world. Nothing has changed in the intervening time. He still uses us to carry His message and ministry into the world. Like the twelve, we may not have any special skills of our own, but the good news is that we also don't need to. Jesus will equip us for the tasks to which He calls us. We must simply be willing to answer the call.

Similarly, sometimes we will find it challenging to work with one another. We are all on the same team, but we are each very different. The way we go about things may be different and the way we think through things might be also. But we must remember what ultimately unites us. We should all be working for a common goal—to carry the message of Jesus Christ to the world around us. If we keep that as our focus, all the other things become secondary issues we can work through together.

Conclusion

This passage is kind of strange in that it doesn't really give us a lot of details on the surface. But that doesn't mean it doesn't contain some valuable lessons for us. It does. There are a couple different lessons I think we are to take away from this passage.

First, we must act on the knowledge we have of God. It is tempting to simply work on memorizing facts so we can blend in with the “church crowd.” We learn to speak the language, sing the songs, and recite the stories. We can learn to answer all the questions in Bible trivia, but if we don't act upon that knowledge then it is worthless. We are no better than the demons who know who Jesus is but refuse to worship and follow Him. Do not allow yourself to make the same mistake. Recognize who Jesus is and then act upon what you know. Follow Him as the Lord, the One who knows best, and the One who deserves your worship and devotion.

Second, Jesus calls each of us to be part of a team. God continues to work in the world through people. The Church today is supposed to be an extension of Jesus' first twelve apostles. Like them, we are to carry the message of Jesus into the world around us. Each of us is going to do that a little differently, and that's ok! But we must remember that we will be stronger and more effective if we work together than if we try to do it alone. God calls people from all sorts of different backgrounds to be together on the same team. Rather than being a liability, I believe this is a benefit. We have the opportunity to learn from each other, to grow together, and to find new and unique ways to bring honor to our Lord. Remember that we are a team!

Finally, God will equip you to do the task He calls you to do. So often, people shy away from serving the Lord in some capacity because they don't feel qualified to do it. If you find those feelings welling up inside of you, think back to Jesus calling the disciples. I'm sure they were terrified to do what Jesus called them to do. But they also trusted that He knew what He was doing. If Jesus said they could do the task He had for them, then they would be able to do it. Remember that as you look for ways to serve Him. He will give you what you need—you just need to follow.

This passage is one that should encourage and embolden us to live for Christ. We must remember who He is, and then live in the light of that knowledge. He doesn't guarantee things will be easy, but He does guarantee that if we'll work together to do what He tells us, we will be successful. And that should motivate us to get to work together.

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