

# INSIDERS AND OUTSIDERS

MARK 3:7-4:34

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Up to this point in his account of the life of Jesus, Mark's been providing various narratives of Jesus' interaction and ministry in public settings. Now, he shifts the attention to scenes where Jesus' interaction and ministry are in more private settings with his more committed followers. In this particular section, Mark builds on the theme concerning the way in which the outsiders are often on the inside and the insiders often find themselves on the outside. In this section of Mark's account, we see Jesus:

- Calling men to become insiders
- Redefining those who are considered insiders
- And teaching in a specific way for these insiders

First, we see Jesus withdraw from the chaos of the crowds and go up on a mountain where he decides to select the twelve original apostles. **These twelve men were to be formal apprentices and were intended to be active advocates of Jesus who embrace and assist in spreading his message to others.**

Here in verses 13-15, we can make a few observations concerning the original twelve apostles:

- They were *called* (3:13) – These men were selected on account of nothing more than Jesus' desire to select these specific men. His grace is his own to distribute however he pleases.

James Edwards writes:

"Jesus determines the call. Disciples do not decide to follow Jesus and do him a favor in so doing; rather his call supersedes their wills."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 111

- They were *appointed* (3:14) – The Greek here implies that, ‘*He made Twelve*’. The apostles signified a type of new creation made by Jesus. Again, we don’t become disciples of Jesus on our own; we are made into disciples by Jesus himself.
- They were *named* (3:14) – Jesus gave these men a new identity. It is Jesus that determines who we are and what we are to be as his disciples.
- They were to *be with him* (3:14) – Discipleship is a relationship; it’s not a process. These men were to consistently hang with Jesus, be taught by Jesus, live like Jesus, and embrace this relationship with him as the most important relationship in their lives.
- They were to be *sent* (3:14) – There is a commission that is a result of this new relationship with Jesus. These men were never intended to just gather among themselves in small *holy huddles* and just have Bible studies. Again, a disciple of Jesus is intended to be an active advocate who embraces and assists in spreading his message to others.

This commission involves these two aspects:

- They were to *preach/teach* (3:14) – When a disciple goes out into the world, he is to proclaim the good news of what Jesus has accomplished and teach others how and why to embrace all the things that Jesus has commanded.
- They were to have *power* (3:15) – A disciple of Jesus is empowered by Jesus (through the Holy Spirit). Jesus has promised his presence with us.

Being an insider (a disciple) isn’t a matter of our own desire, decision or determination. There is no power in naming yourself a Christian and then trying to associate yourself with Christian circles. Being a Christian is a calling into a special relationship. We are to be with Jesus and be his apprentices.

Discipleship involves being selected by Jesus, made into something new by him and named by him with a specific new identity and purpose in life. It is a relationship with Jesus that involves a commission from Jesus that consists of the proclamation of the gospel and a great empowerment over evil and sin.

So, after he selects these twelve men to be insiders, we then see Jesus in a situation where he redefines those who are considered insiders and those who are considered outsiders. Because not only are the religious authorities struggling with the things that Jesus is claiming, his own family and friends think he's lost his mind (3:21).

Jesus never forsakes his relationship with his biological family, but here he explains that our true family is the family of God.

Mark records the account like this:

“And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you.” And he answered them, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.”” (Mark 3:31-35)

When we imagine Jesus being inside the house, we would expect his family to be inside and the crowd to be outside. However, the one's we would assume as the insiders are on the outside and the one's we would assume as the outsiders are on the inside.

You see, growing up in church, being baptized, going through confirmation classes, having a Christian grandmother doesn't make us an insider or part of the family. Just like his mother and brothers here, many come to Jesus and call on him with false assumptions that they have insider access when in fact they may be among those left on the outside.

We should also point out that often times being a disciple of Jesus will result in immediate conflict with family members who are opposed to our new identity as a Jesus-follower. Jesus reveals how we must be willing to endure this conflict and embrace our new eternal family rather than compromising our faith and our mission in order to appease our biological earthly family.

We're still called to honor our biological family, but we also have a new allegiance to our new family with God as our Father and other believers as our adopted brothers and sisters.<sup>2</sup> The family of God should take priority over our biological families whenever there is dissension between the two. We should be pulling our biological family towards the family of God rather than having the tug of our biological family pulling us away from God.

And so here, Jesus has redefined the definition of what it means to be inside his family. Those who come to him and call on him assuming false privileges are left on the outside. Those who are with Jesus and seek to do what he desires are the ones that are on the inside his family circle.

And now lastly, in continuing his theme of insiders and outsiders, Mark shows the specific way in which Jesus chose to teach those in his inside circle. The parables that he often taught were a specific way of warning those on the outside while instructing those on the inside.

We see Jesus explaining this when Mark writes:

"And he said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." And when he was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parables. And he said to them, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables, so that, "They may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven."" (Mark 4:9-12)

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<sup>2</sup> see Romans 8:14-17

There's a scene in the movie *White Men Can't Jump* where Wesley Snipes and Woody Harrelson are in the car driving down the road. As they're driving Harrelson begins to play a Jimi Hendrix tape in the car. Snipes begins to accuse Harrelson of being able to listen to Hendrix but not being capable of hearing Hendrix. Snipes tells Harrelson:

"Look man, you can listen to Jimi but you can't hear him. There's a difference man. Just because you're listening to him doesn't mean you're hearing him."

Snipes is basically telling Harrelson that he is incapable of getting and understanding the message of Hendrix even though he likes listening to Hendrix. Harrelson definitely enjoys the music, but he's not trying to know and understand Jimi Hendrix. And according to Snipes, Harrelson is incapable of actually hearing Hendrix.

Jesus' parables were listened to by many but were intended for the ears of those who were capable of hearing and understanding Jesus himself.

Jesus proclaims that only those with ears to hear will understand the message that he teaches through these parables. Only those who genuinely seek to know and understand Jesus will be able to understand what he's teaching. Everyone else will listen to the message but will fail to hear it properly.

The parables are the proverbial sword that divides the insiders from the outsiders. Failure to hear the principle in the parable is confirmation that one is an outsider which is actually the main principle taught in the parable of the sower.

In observing the *Parable of the Sower* in the original Greek, it is interesting to learn that the first three references to *hearing* in this parable are different from the fourth. The tense of the first three implies a casual, in and out kind of hearing (like having a song on while driving). The tense of the last one implies a continually engaged kind of hearing.

It means we are seeking and desiring to hear what God says.

Having ears to hear involves the surrender of proud self-reliance and involves humble submission to God. Having ears to hear means you acknowledge that you don't know it all and that you are willing to learn. It is this kind of hearing, welcoming of the message and responding appropriately that provides the evidential confirmation that one is truly an insider.

Jesus calls, redefines and teaches those inside the family of God. And just as his family seems contrary to what one might expect, we learn from his parables that his kingdom advances contrary to all our expectations as well – Jesus is the unordinary King who selects people to help him conquer the world through gospel seeds rather than with an army of swords.