

This summer about 70 students and leaders will take part in a couple of short-term mission trips in Tecate, Mexico, and Kaufman, Texas. They will be serving in various capacities with the goal of showing Jesus to those He misses most. I have asked them to be here this morning because as I prepared this message I realized that Mark 3 is a photo gallery featuring the diverse groups of people that Jesus encountered during His ministry and how they responded to His message. Our high school students are going to meet these same groups when they get to Mexico. So let's get to know these people.

**The curious...vv. 7-10.** This should come as no surprise. Everywhere Jesus went the crowds gathered. I'm sure many of them liked his teaching. They liked His combative Spirit when He confronted the religious leaders but most people followed Him because He had something they needed. He healed the sick, cast our demons and even served lunch to thousands who came to hear Him. Many of these people were big fans of Jesus. But it is clear that they don't yet fully understand who He is or what He is about.

The curious will follow you too. Any young Gringo with a soccer ball in hand will draw a crowd. You will attract the curious. Jesus has a lot of fans in Mexico. These people will know about Jesus...and Mary, and the Virigin of Guadalupe, and the Pope and many other religious figures. But many of them have never heard the gospel.

**The conflicted...vv. 11-12.** This is the second time an unclean spirit speaks to Jesus. "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God." Mk. 1:24. I've said it before and will probably say it again, one of the ironies of the gospel story is that fact that while everyone else is trying to figure out who Jesus is, the unclean or demonic spirits have no doubt. They know He is the Son of God.

You are going to encounter people who live under the influence of evil. They will resist you. Jesus was and still is the ultimate threat to all demonic activity. This helps explain why there are forces at work to eliminate all Christian symbols in our society. (Photo of Mojave cross – erected in 1934 by John Riley Bembrey, a medic in the First World War, as a memorial to many of his friends who were killed in WWI. 65 years later the cross was declared illegal on public property because of the separation of church and state).

It is easy for us to become furious with the people who promote this nonsense but they are merely pawns of an evil force opposed to God since before time began. Listen to the word of God, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." Eph. 6:12. Do you believe that? Then why take out our wrath on flesh and blood? Misdirected anger is ugly as well as counter productive. There is no political solution to man's problem. Since the problem is not a flesh and blood problem then the resolution transcends any human solution. "Though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds." 2 Cor. 10:3-4

**The called...vv. 13-19.** He called them to be “with Him.” You cannot be like Him unless you have been “with Him.” If you want to be like someone you admire you have to know what makes them who they are. What are their priorities and their values? The more time you spend with someone the more like them you will become. Last week we talked about listening to Jesus – objectively and subjectively. Most of what we learn in church is how to listen objectively. God has spoken through His word and there are a multitude of issues addressed clearly in the scriptures. But we also have to learn to listen subjectively. That means we not only have to read with our eyes and think with our brain but we need to “open the eyes of our heart” as Paul would say. Obviously your heart does not have eyes but Paul is speaking metaphorically. The heart is the control center of your life. He is praying that the Ephesians will make good decisions based on their ability to apply what they know to every situation. The more time we spend with Jesus the more confident we can be that our values and our decisions are consistent with those of Jesus.

In the book of Acts followers of Jesus were identifiable because they did what Jesus did. “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. 14 But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition.” Acts 4:13-14. Followers of Jesus can be identified because they have spent time with Him that they say and do what He would say and do.

One of the greatest gifts you have is the gift of influence. You are influencing someone all the time, especially children. They will want to be like you. (Picture of Fritschie). If someone wants to follow you be sure you are following Jesus.

**The contrarian...vv. 22-30.** The Pharisees were looking for a reason to discredit Jesus. They had prejudged Him because he was a threat to the status quo. Their built-in bias led to irrational thinking. If Jesus has a demon then why is he casting out demons? (vv. 23-26). You will hear this kind of thinking from people who are so committed to a lifestyle that is opposed to God’s best for them that they look for any reason to discredit the faith. “There are too many hypocrites in the church.” “The church is always asking for money.” “Christians are bigoted and judgmental.” Sometimes you have to challenge this thinking.

Jesus doesn’t go easy on these guys. In fact, He accuses them of “blasphemy of the Holy Spirit,” an eternal, unforgivable sin. What is blasphemy of the Holy Spirit? It is “an attitude (not an isolated act or utterance) of defiant hostility toward God that rejects His saving power toward man, expressed in the Spirit-empowered person and work of Jesus.” (BKC). The Scribes and Pharisees were attributing the deliverance brought by the Holy Spirit to Satan. It is possible to become so perverted in your thinking that good becomes evil and evil becomes good. A world system that is hostile to the gospel will always make evil look attractive and good look foolish.

**The concerned...vv. 20-21; 31-35.** It is not uncommon for some of us to shrink back from the truth of the gospel in response to those who are offended by the message. It must have been difficult being a member of Jesus’ family. How do you explain His actions? You never know when He is going to offend someone, particularly someone

important. You know Him so you know His heart. He is kind and loving and gracious, but He is also firm and confrontational; bold and offensive. I sometimes get emails from people who are offended by what I say. I then have to go back and determine whether I truly did say something offensive or whether I simply preached the message and the person was offended by the truth. Jesus never had to worry about this. His words were always true and so were His motives. He never diluted the truth just because it was uncomfortable to some. If you live in a deep, dark dungeon for months, even years, and someone comes and sets you free and lead you out into the full light of day you will be offended by the light. It will hurt your eyes. But you are free. As the Greek philosopher Diogenes once said, "Truth is like light to sore eyes. He who never offended anyone probably never did anyone any good."

When we follow Jesus we become members of His forever family. That may put us at odds with our biological family. There is a stronger bond than that of flesh and blood. Those committed to doing the will of God are His family members. One of the fun things about going on a missions trip is the discovery that there are people from other countries who don't speak your language whom you have never met and within a few minutes you realize they are like family. That's because they are. Your job is to grow that family. Invite others to be part of your family. You never know where God will show up.

Last night I did a wedding in Weatherford. The grandmother of the bride lives in Massachussets. She pulled me aside after the wedding and wanted me to meet her husband. He had been in Mass. General ICU for 44 days with meningitis. He slipped into a coma and this lady started playing my sermons that her granddaughter sent her. He woke up and has now recovered. She told me that one of the doctors told her he had been impacted those sermons. Jesus has a message for all groups in all nations for all time. It is a message of good news about a Kingdom where everything will be made new. You represent that message. You have no control over who will hear it. Your job is simply to go and make it known. And you never know who may be watching and listening.

Let's support these students through prayer and by giving \$17,000 to help pay for the total cost of the two trips. The total cost for a High School student is \$1291 and for Jr. High \$250. So far we have raised \$3,100 (last week) and therefore need almost \$14k this Sunday to meet our goal.

"For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, 16 I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, 18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might 20 that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come." Eph. 1:15-21

