

Mark 3:7-35, Calling of the Twelve
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Overview

1. Note similarity of 3:7 with 1:45:
 - a) People hear what the Lord can do
 - b) They flock to him in great numbers.
 - c) He withdraws from the cities to the open spaces.

2. These bracketing verses are not part of 2:1-3:6, but form an "external inclusio," setting off the controversy section as a sidebar or footnote. Mark wants us to know that the opposition is there from the first, but at the same time the general flow of the gospel is interrupted by this description.

3. What is that general flow?
 - a) Starts in Judaea with John's baptism, 1:5.
 - b) Jesus comes from Galilee and immediately returns there, 1:14, to a demonstration of power and authority that spreads his fame throughout the entire region, 1:28, 39, and makes it impossible for him to enter publicly into the villages without being mobbed.
 - c) 3:7 now tells us that his fame has spread beyond Galilee, to the farthest reaches of the country. From here to 8:27 takes us as far as "Tyre and Sidon" (7:24-31) on the way to the great confession at Caesarea Philippi (8:27-29), before turning south "by the farther side of Jordan" (10:1) on his way to "Jerusalem" (11:1). Thus the places named in 3:8 are roughly in reverse order to the itinerary in the following chapters through ch. 10, which occupy two phases
 - 1) Back and forth in the wider region about Galilee, 3:7-9:29
 - 2) Directed travel southward to Jerusalem, 9:30-10:52
 - d) Finally, the Galilean returns to Judaea, where he dies and rises again, 11-16

4. In general, shifts in place in narrative mark successive scenes. Note the settings of the successive scenes in this section.
 - a) 7-12, By the sea to accommodate the multitudes.
 - b) 13-19a, On the mountain to choose twelve from the multitude for special training and assignments.
 - c) 20b-34, In the house with his followers, who are here distinguished both from his natural relations and from his enemies.
 - d) Thus as ch. 2 crystallizes the opposition against him, ch. 3 organizes his followers.

A. 7-12, Ministry by the Sea

Recalls us from the scene of controversy to the Lord's demonstrated

Power and the resulting Popularity seen in ch.1; prepares us for the expanded geographical scope of the Lord's work.

1. 7a, Withdrawal. Enough controversy for now. As in 1:45, the Lord leaves the confines of the city for the open spaces.
2. 7b-8, Projected Scope. Note chiastic structure with summary/detail: starts/ends with "a great multitude," the first "from Galilee," the second from the entire country, tracing in reverse the route he will follow on his way to the cross.
3. 7b-9, Popularity.
 - a) In 7-8, the "great multitude from" every place already reinforces this, as in 1:45 "they came to him from every quarter." Note their motive: "when they had heard what great things he did." Still chasing material benefits.
 - b) 9 makes the point vivid by showing the preparations needed to keep the crowds from pressing the Lord into the sea.
 - c) Contrast these multitudes with the religious leaders in ch.2.
 - 1) The crowds love him; the leaders hate him.
 - 2) But the leaders may have a better understanding of his claims, for they recognize in him a threat to their own preeminence; the crowds see only a free clinic.
4. 10-12, His Power in the same two domains seen in ch. 1. The parallelism of the two is seen in the repetition of the root *piptw* "to fall" in 10 "press upon" *epi~~pi~~ptw* and 11 "fell down" *prosp~~pi~~ptw*. In both cases the Lord's power is emphasized by the lack of effort he must put forth; he is practically passive in the matter.
 - a) 10, healing at a touch. Note who is doing the touching: contrast 1:41 (the leper) and compare 5:28 (the woman with an issue). The Lord does not need to reach out and touch anyone; they merely need to touch him! So naturally sick people mob him.
 - b) 11-12, the demons don't wait to be exorcised, but submit to him whenever (Gk) they see him. Why does he refuse their testimony? Several possible reasons:
 - 1) To cut down on the growth of the crowd, as in the prohibition to the leper in 1:44? But with the leper there was the ancillary motive of getting word to Jerusalem as fast as possible.
 - 2) To cut short the demon's own attempt to cast a spell on Jesus, as in 1:24; 5:7? Perhaps.
 - 3) Likely, to avoid charges of being in league with Satan. He must make clear that they are not his messengers, his

heralds.

- c) Note the "for" in v.10. This power explains why they thronged the Lord. Reemphasizes the fleshly motive we have already seen in v.8, "what great things he did." No mention in this entire paragraph of the Lord's teaching, yet "therefore came I forth" (1:38).

B. 13-19a, Calling of the Twelve Disciples

Two things in the previous paragraph show the need of a more official set of followers: the multitudes show that the magnitude of the task at hand is more than Jesus can handle himself, and the spontaneous announcements by demons show the need for responsible heralds who will not be confused with Satan's minions. So the Lord sets apart twelve to be his representatives.

1. 13, The Manner of the Call

Two characteristics that we must keep in mind whenever we consider the Lord's call:

- a) It is Sovereign, initiated by him at his will. In Gk, the subject is emphatic: "He himself called whom he wished." He makes the selection; he takes the initiative. We recognize this sovereign call to salvation, cf. Rom. 9, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy." Here, we are concerned with a call from among those who were already followers of him, to special service.
 - 1) Sometimes missionary conferences (for example) give the impression that God has called everyone to missionary service and it's up to us to respond. In fact, the call to service is just as focused and just as sovereign as the call to salvation. Cf. Acts 13:2.
 - 2) It's certainly wrong to hold back when the Lord calls you to a service, confirming his call (as in Antioch) through the demonstrated effectiveness of your ministry on a local scale. But it's also disastrous to rush enthusiastically but unproven into a ministry on the strength of a flush of emotional enthusiasm.
 - 3) Every believer has some fundamental responsibilities: live a holy life; be ready always to give a reason for the hope that is in you; work diligently to provide for your household; function in the local church as a member of the body. If God has a more focused role for you, he will reveal it as he prospers your efforts locally.
- b) It is Effective; it produces results in our lives. In the case of salvation, "whom he called, them he also justified," Rom. 8:30. In the case of service, the ones who are truly called do in fact go forth and bear fruit; those who make shipwreck show that they were not truly called of God.

2. 14-15, The Purposes of the Call

The multitudes are "followers," attracted to the Lord for a variety of reasons. Here he singles out a smaller group for two more specialized callings: discipleship and apostleship. Must not confuse these three; they are not equivalents. Each presumes the one before and adds more to it.

- a) Followers included the disciples (1:18, 2:14), but also the multitudes (2:15; 3:7). Many different levels of interest. Some he explicitly invites, but others come because of their own curiosity. Wide range of levels of commitment, which the Lord can discern, John 2:23-25. So today, not everyone who claims to "follow" the Lord is really his.
- b) Discipleship, "that they should be with him."
 - 1) Unlike the crowds, who come to be healed and then leave, the twelve are to stay continuously with the Lord, so that they can learn from him. This role is reflected in the title "disciple," which literally means "learner." The multitude came to Jesus as patients to a doctor or an audience to an entertainer; the twelve were to be students of a teacher.
 - 2) "Disciple" is by far the dominant term for the Twelve in the book; occurs 43x, against 1x for "apostle." Also the dominant term for the mass of Christians in Acts, where it appears 29x, in contrast with "saint" 4x, "Christian" 2x, "believer" 1x. ("Apostle" is 31x, but used only for the Twelve.) This emphasis ought to mark our lives as well. Our focus should be first of all not on having our needs met, but on spending time with the Lord and learning from him.
- c) Apostleship, "that he might send them forth [*apostellw*]" Disciple focuses on their preparation with Jesus; Apostle focuses on their ministry as he sends them out. Their work reflects all three aspects of his, as seen in ch. 1:
 - 1) "to preach," to proclaim the good news that the Messiah has come and calls all men to submission. He mentions this first as the most important (1:38) and the most likely to be shut out by the demands of the multitudes.
 - 2) "to have authority ... to heal ... and to cast out" To demonstrate their heavenly authority, they will be given his ability to deal with sickness and demons.

3. The Objects of the Call

There seems to be an ordering from the most prominent to the least, emphasizing that not all have the same ministry, and the Lord's sovereignty includes the right to put some in place who seem to us more a hindrance than a help, for his own purposes.

- a) 16-17, The Inner Circle. Throughout the gospel, Peter, James,

and John seem to stand in a special relation with the Lord. At the home of Jairus (5:37), on the mount of transfiguration (9:2), and in the garden (14:33), they are "with him" when the other nine are excluded. They are also called first (in ch. 1, together with Andrew, Peter's brother, who joins them in initiating the Olivet Discourse, 13:3). In this list, their special relation is indicated in two ways. First, they are listed first. Second, the Lord gives them new names, not particularly flattering ones.

- 1) "Simon" becomes "Peter," "the stone." The contrast in Matt. 16:18 with the rock of Christ's own words (cf. Matt. 7:24) shows that stability is not the idea! He is marked more by impetuosity and stubbornness, the one who denies the Lord. "Peter the rockhead" might be more the idea.
- 2) James and John are "sons of thunder," cf. their desire for preeminence (10:35) and vengeance (Luke 9:54).
- 3) These names indicate the Lord's knowledge of their special needs; perhaps they became the "inner circle" because they needed more attention than the others!
 - a> This should encourage us that the Lord is willing to work with us through our faults.
 - b> Should also encourage us not to give up on losers, but to recognize their problems frankly and deal with them.
- b) 18, The mass of the team. Starts with Andrew, Peter's brother, then Philip and Nathanael, who acc. to John 1 were the next to join the band, then Matthew, who joined in ch.2 (but under the name "Levi"; Mark does not identify the two). The others appear to have been added at this juncture. Thus this portion of the list appears to be chronological.
- c) 19, The traitor. Placed last because of his shameful conduct; identified to emphasize that the Lord, who "himself called whom he wished," did not take Judas on by accident, but deliberately. While the Jewish leaders pretend to plot his death secretly, he makes provision for the mechanism by which he will offer himself to redeem his people.

C. 19b-35, Challenges from the Anti-Disciples

This section deals with two challenges to the Lord, one from his family who fear for his sanity, the other from the Scribes who accuse him of demonism. The family challenge is introduced first but resolved last, setting up a rough chiasm.

1. 19a, Setting: "They went into a house."

- a) In Mark, "the house" is the place of instruction for the disciples, see 1:29; 2:15; 7:17 "from the people"; 9:28,33; 10:10. The Lord chose them "that they might be with him,"

and he wastes no time investing time in them. The intent is to get away from the crowds for private instruction.

b) Thus this section contrasts the disciples, the "in-group," with two possible sources of opposition: well-meaning but unspiritual family, and antagonistic adversaries.

2. 20, The Inciting Event. In spite of their desire for privacy, the crowds discover them and seek them out, denying them not only quite discussion but even freedom to take a meal. Patiently, the Lord does not send them away or demand his "rights," but cares for them in spite of his fatigue, cf. 6:31-37. It is apparently this selfless devotion to the needs of his followers that leads both his family and his friends to question his sanity.

3. 21, The Friends' Challenge (Introduced)

a) "His friends" is a general expression that is further defined in 31 "his brethren and his mother." Used in LXX of Prov. 31:21 for "her household." The interposition of the episode with the scribes between this verse and 31 may reflect the distance from Nazareth to Capernaum; the relatives hear of the crowd and set out, and while they are traveling the local scribes get in their licks.

b) Their concern: "He is beside himself." Not a malicious ascription; simply indicates that his conduct does not meet their concept of rationality, a view at times held even by his disciples (cf. Peter. in 8:32).

c) Their intent: take him into custody, for his own protection.

d) *Application*: Not every threat to spirituality wears horns and a long tail. Sometimes the legitimate though fleshly concerns of our friends and family can run counter to the Lord's purposes. Once again we are confronted with the basic principle of NT spirituality: each of us stands or falls directly to the Lord. We can't blame our family, or our enemies, our church, or our employer. We must know the Lord intimately enough that we can discern his will directly through the Scriptures and the Spirit.

4. 22-30, The Scribes' Challenge

They have "come down from Jerusalem," perhaps in response to the healing of the leper at the end of ch. 1. (Recall that ch. 2 is parenthetical.)

a) 22, Accused by Scribes

They speak of the Lord in the third person, as in 2:7, rather than accusing him directly. Their charge has two aspects:

1) He himself is possessed by Satan. By itself this would be only a little worse than the family's fears, that he is a victim of an unfortunate condition.

- 2) He casts out demons by demonic power. This makes him an active practitioner of demonism, and so is a more serious charge.
 - 3) Note the chiasmic resumption of this charge in v.30.
- b) 23-29, His Answer
- "He called them unto him," discerning (as in ch. 2) the substance of the conversation they thought was only among themselves. This ability to perceive the intents of their hearts must in itself have shaken them. He not only answers them, but goes beyond their immediate question to a personal warning to them.
- 1) 23-26, Refutation of their charge.
 - a> This is the first "parable" given by Mark, a comparison between earthly realities (kingdoms, households) and spiritual truths (the unity of Satan's program).
 - b> Their notion that Satan casts out himself is not credible. Note the progression, from a kingdom (which might admit diversity, but cannot stand a civil war) to the more intimate bounds of a household, to the single person of Satan. The argument is a *fortiori*. If internal dissension is fatal to a political entity, and even more so to a household of limited resources, how much more is it to a single person?
 - c> The Lord describes the demonic host as summed up in Satan, rather than as a plurality, perhaps because of Satan's insistence on centralized, top-down rule that subjugates all thinking to his own.
 - 2) 27, True explanation of his exorcisms. Another parable, comparing exorcism with physical warfare.
 - a> Jesus comes to spoil (take as the plunder of battle) the goods held by a strong man. "Goods" is literally "vessels," which in the earthly picture would hold valuable material (gold, or oil), and in the spiritual reality are the people who have been possessed by demons (cf. the figurative use of *skeuh* in this sense in Acts 9:15; Rom 9:21-23; 2 Cor 4:7; 1 Thes 4:4; 2 Tim 2:20-21; 1 Pet 3:7; Rev 2:27). In casting out demons, the Lord is taking possession of people who had been Satan's slaves. Cf. Eph. 4:8.

Application: We are only vessels, valuable not for what we are in ourselves, but for the contents with which we are filled.
 - b> Such an act of plunder requires that the strong man

first be bound. That is, Jesus is not under Satan's control, but in fact is opposing him.

c> Note the shift from potentiality ("can enter ... and spoil") to actuality ("he will spoil his house"). The Lord Jesus is not only able to overcome Satan, but actually accomplishes the victory.

3) 28-29, Warning about their attitude. The "unforgiveable" nature of this sin appears because it is the sin of refusing forgiveness!

a> "Blaspheme against the HS" does not mean "blaspheme the HS"; the construction used here appears elsewhere in the NT only in Luke's parallel. Rather, the sense is "to blaspheme in a way that opposes the Spirit's work."

b> The Holy Spirit is the one who leads people to repentance.

1> As a direct work of the Spirit in the heart of the sinner, this is a New Covenant promise, according to John 17:8 ("when he ... is come, he shall ..."), anticipated prophetically in the OT (Isa 32:15; 44:3; Ezek 39:29; Joel 2:28; Zech 12:10), and to some degree it was a dynamic even in the OT (Prov 1:23).

2> Before Pentecost, he did this work through Spirit-empowered messengers, Acts 7:51,52. In particular, he was responsible for empowering the Lord's actions, actions that were meant to endorse his claims and lead people to repentance and faith.

c> Ascribing the work of the HS (whether directly or through messengers) to Satan is to deny this work of the Spirit in leading us to salvation, and thus is a direct refusal to heed the warnings that God is offering.

d> This is the pinnacle of a series of things that one can do against the HS:

1> Grieve the HS (Eph. 4:30) by an unholy life (vv.28,29).

2> Quench the HS (1 Thes 5:19) by a cold formalism that denies his ability to communicate with us directly

3> Resist the HS (Acts 7:51) by rejecting his messengers (v.52) (this is very close to the force of the Lord's warning, and shows that the Spirit has this role of convicting through messengers even in the OT).

5. 31-34, The Friends' Challenge (Resolved)

- a) 31-32, The Challenge. Recall that in v.21 the Lord's household "went out" from Nazareth, motivated by fear that he had become unbalanced and with the objective of taking him into protective custody. Now they arrive, but because of the crowd are unable to press through to him, and the crowd tells him of their presence and desire to talk with him.
- b) 33-34, His Answer. Physical relations mean nothing, in comparison with the spiritual bond that joins the Lord with others who "do the will of God." This condition is not a denial of salvation by grace through faith, but a recognition that those who are truly saved will live in obedience to God.

6. Summary:

- a) Like the Lord, be sure of your personal communication with the Lord. Recognize that not only spiritual enemies, but even well-meaning family, may seek to derail you from being a vessel filled with the Lord's blessings.
- b) Unlike his family, be careful in your interactions with other believers that you do not derail or discourage them.