

The Multitudes and the Disciples

Mark 3:7

Isaiah 49:1-7

Luke 24:44-50

Responsive Psalm 115:1-11

Today we are going to be continuing our study in the book of Mark starting in verse 7 of chapter 3. So let us take a moment to read 7-12. So right off the start just from a surface look at this passage and what we have seen in the other accounts up to this point is that in Jesus' ministry there are 3 distinct different groups of people. We see that throughout his Galilean ministry that there is always a multitude of people following him seeking to be healed or to witness a miracle. Within these people that are following Jesus we see 3 different responses to his ministry which we will take a few moments to look at.

First there is the Disciples, and those who believe that Jesus is the Messiah that he claims to be. 2nd, is the great multitude of people who gather to experience or to witness a great marvel, and then 3rd, we have those who are seeking to discredit Christ's claim, and who eventually turn to more aggressive and violent ways to rid themselves of this Jesus problem.

So first we are going to look at the Disciples, those who Christ sought out and called upon to follow him. Who left their life behind and dedicated their life to following Christ. But along with these disciples are also the others who believe, who go on to live their lives after seeing and believing upon Jesus. This is a group of dedicated, true believers in Christ. What we see here is the beginnings of the church. I am using this term in it's broader sense, not in the modern idea that we use it today, but in the sense that Christ is going about gathering to himself through his gospel ministry a particular set of people who because of Christ's work is set apart. We see it here in the early ministry with those who go away believing, with those who have faith and believe that Jesus is the promised Messiah.

These are those who the word of Christ had a profound impact on their lives, who after their encounter with Jesus walk away being something completely different than what they were when they came. Nothing has changed today, Christ still has a profound effect on the lives of sinners who have been called to holiness, who Christ has forgiven and set apart for his glory. These committed followers of Christ heed the call to worship, to disciple, and to preach, offering up their energy and resources to further the spread of the gospel. These who are set apart, and committed individuals continue to strive to be more and more like Christ in their personal lives. Displaying as Paul calls it, the fruits of the spirit, which is love, joy, peace, long suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control.

Then we have the 2nd group that we see here. The multitude, a very large group of people that is mentioned in a rather impersonal way. At this time in Mark we don't know how many make up this multitude, in some places we get a glimpse at just how large this group can be like in the feeding of the 5000. But what we do see here in verse 9 is that Jesus told his disciples to get a small boat ready for him because the large crowd of people who were gathered and following him were pressing to the point that he may be trampled. As we have seen everywhere Jesus went there always seemed to be large groups of people who gathered to see a miracle, who wanted to witness something amazing. There are also those in this group who come because of illness who are seeking to be healed.

Even though these large group of people would follow him, constantly pressing on him there is never the distinction made about their belief as there was in the account of some. That is not to say

that there aren't many who are not recorded that after hearing Christ's teaching went away believing, but the vast majority of them were there either for a chance at being healed, or just to witness an amazing spectacle.

Most of them came seeking their own purpose and satisfaction, seeking Jesus out of selfish reasons, not wanting to miss out, wanting to be a part of this new phenomenon that was happen. So just like we saw with the first group, of committed followers of Christ, we can look at this large sea of people who are following Christ, not out of faith, but rather for their own selfish reasons and we can still see the same thing today can we not?

One of the ways that this may express itself today is in the person who attends services, maybe even regularly but is unwilling to fully and completely commit. They may bounce around from church to church, looking to find one that fits their perceived needs. And sadly we have seen the church today respond to these multitudes by trying to make themselves appealing to these tire kickers. To these people who are intrigued, who are afraid of missing out, or maybe they just know it is the right thing to do. They are attending church to appease their conscious, but never truly commit to the gospel, never truly put aside their sin and selfishness. They are quick to find controversy, quick to be offended by the word, quick to leave when things just aren't how they want them to be. They are fickle, self pleasing, observers never committing themselves fully to the ministry of Christ. Sadly I think that this makes up the multitude of those who are sitting in churches today just as it was in the time of Christ. Many gather, but few believe.

Then the 3rd group, or response that we see to Christ's ministry is those who outright reject it, and who seek to cause harm. In those multitudes that gathered around Jesus there was always the presence of the Pharisee's and others who sought to discredit, or to catch Jesus and his followers breaking some part of the mosaic law. These detractors eventually became violent, not just seeking to undermine and discredit Jesus, but they sought his death. So how does this translate to today? These are the people who have heard the gospel, who have seen it's effect on those who believe yet they harden their hearts, they continue in their sin, and may actually become combative about it. They mock, and joke about God, and they make light of your faith, and get joy out of flaunting their sin. Just like the pharisee's of Jesus day we can even see the same trend in our societies opinion of Christians.

I just found it interesting that encapsulated in these accounts of Jesus' ministry is a perfect picture of the state of the church today. Many gather, some out of curiosity, some out of seeking selfish fulfillment, and some come in to cause harm, and out of that massive crowd of innumerable people is a small group of those who are faithful, who are true and committed followers of Christ.

So in our passage today, it says in verse 7 that Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the sea. This is the only recorded occurrence of Jesus withdrawing in Mark but there are many times recorded in Matthew that Jesus would withdraw and seek solitude, often times breaking away to pray, or teach his disciples. But even here we see that no matter where Jesus went it wasn't long until a large crowd would gather. But Marks recording of this multitude here is interesting, for he says that many from Galilee followed him, and from Judea and Jerusalem, but also Idumea and beyond the Jordan, even those from Tyre and Sidon. Previously the groups that would follow Jesus were fairly localized, but what we are seeing in this recording here in Mark is the spread of his popularity, how the word about his miracles, and teachings are spreading.

Idumea was 120 miles south of Capernium, and Tyre and Sidon were 50 miles north. Now the interesting thing about this is not only the range of influence but of the people. Galilee, Jerusalem, and

Judea were of course the localized Jewish population. But Mark mentions Idumea and beyond the Jordan were mixed Jew and Gentile regions. And lastly he mentions Tyre and Sidon which were largely if not entirely Gentile.

This is an important thing to take note of because Jesus far exceeds the influence of John the Baptist whose influence only reached those of Jerusalem and Judea. We see John's message in chapter 1, verse 7. "And he preached, saying, there comes one after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down to loose." And in much the same way Mark is alluding to a fulfillment in Isaiah's portrayal of the servant of the Lord in Isaiah 49 that we read this morning. With the record of Gentile people gathering from Tyre and Sidon to see this Jesus, we see that he is also a light unto the Gentiles as well as to the Jews. In this recording of Mark we see the fulfillment of this passage in Isaiah.

But along with this fame and popularity comes a problem, which proves to both be an opportunity, and an obstacle to Jesus in his ministry. Just as we saw earlier in chapter 2, large crowds make it difficult to navigate and teach. In chapter 2 there was a large crowd of people jamming the doorway into the house that Jesus was in. And here we see he tells his disciples to ready a boat so that he does not get trampled. We tend to have this idea like what we see in all the art work portraying Jesus ministering to the multitudes. He is standing there on a rock while people patiently gather around to hear what he has to say. But according to the accounts we see in Mark that is not the case at all, in fact it would probably be more accurate to equate it to what we see today with large crowds and reporters pressing against celebrities.

The crowd is more hostile than we tend to imagine it, As we see in verse 9 and 10 "So he told his disciples that a small boat should be kept ready for him because of the multitude lest they should crush him, for he healed many, so that as many as had afflictions pressed about him to touch him. They were constantly pushing and shoving their way to get to Jesus so that they may be healed. You can see how this would actually be more of a hindrance than an opportunity. And amongst all this, Mark says that whenever unclean spirits saw him they would fall down before him and cry out saying You are the son of God.

This isn't an announcement of faith, for James says, that Even the demons believe and tremble. This record here is not even necessarily one of any exorcism, but it just shows the power and authority of Christ that just being in his presence the demon's only response is to prostrate themselves before him. I just find it interesting that here we have those who are known to have unclean spirits, and we read an account of these spirits crying out calling Jesus the Son of God and they are obviously afraid of him, yet the Pharisees still harden their hearts and reject Christ plotting to put him to death. But I suppose it is also possible that they did not actually witness such things, for Jesus commanded them to be silent as we see in verse 12. "He sternly warned them that they should not make him known."

Why Jesus warned them and wanted them to be silent is something I think that we can only speculate on. For to me at least it seems that this would be preferable, and a pretty strong witness to see and hear these people possessed by unclean spirits act in such a way. This is only the 2nd mention in Mark about Jesus being the Son of God, and the first one was at his baptism when God said, You are my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And now even the demons recognize him and shout out who he is. But the one thing that we can take from this is the Authority that Jesus has, not only over the physical with the miracles and healings that he had been doing but also over the spiritual, commanding unclean spirits to leave, and to be silent.

This account here and the response of these unclean spirits shows without a doubt the Jesus total control over the spiritual realm, these demonic forces have no other choice then to acknowledge Christ's sovereignty and their subjection to it.

Continuing on here, verse 13 says “And he went up on the mountain and called to him those he himself wanted. And they came to him, Then he appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach, and to have power to heal sickness and cast out demons. Simon, to him he gave the name Peter, James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James to whome he gave the name Bo-a-ner-ges, that is, Sons of Thunder. Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Mathew, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot who also betrayed him and they went into a house.”

One of the major themes so far in the book of Mark is the following of Jesus. In these first few chapters there is quite a bit of time and detail spent talking about the multitudes and crowds of people who gather, and the specific people that Jesus had called to be his disciples. Out of this larger group of Followers and disciples that Jesus had gathered, he specifically called out 12 to join him to be his formal apprentices. Notice the wording here, in the first part of verse 13, “And he went up on the mountain, and called to him those he himself wanted.” Throughout scripture mountains play an important role in the revelation of God. In the old testament we see many accounts of those early saints ascending mountains to receive some revelation, or commands from God and this here really is no different. If we look at the last half of this sentence, “and called to him those he himself wanted.” Just as God commanded Abraham to ascend to the spot that he would reveal to him to sacrifice his son Isaac, just as Moses ascended mount Sinai where God gave him his commandments, we see Jesus calling a specific group of 12 of his disciples to give them a commission, and appoint them to be witnesses and preachers to the gospel of Christ.

The word that Mark uses here that is translated in our bibles as appointed, is actually the same Greek word that we see in Genesis 1:1, which is *epoiesen*, meaning to make, to create, to bring into existence. While this was a common term used it was more then likely chosen by Mark here to denote that these 12 disciples were something different, something new, created by Jesus. He called them to himself, and granted them to power to heal the sick and to cast out demons. This actually becomes an important distinction to make because it points to Christ, his purpose, his plan and it does not focus on what the disciples can do for him, but rather what Christ makes out of them. This is not a far stretch, and is a perfect picture once again of the effectual call of Christ to those he himself chooses. As we have seen Jesus has the authority over the physical realm, and the spiritual realm, it only makes sence that he too would have the authority to call who he wills, to do what he wills, and not only that, it is by his power that he does so.

Last week we talked about how God using only a word was able to create the universe out of nothing, and Jesus his son is able to heal the sick, cast out demons, and raise the dead by the speaking of a word. The authority of Christ over all things is utterly astounding, yet in many gatherings of our christian brothers and sisters it is commonly taught that God has all authority over all things, except your will. It is you who must ask him to come to you, it is you who has the power to summon him and request forgiveness. Yet look at this account here, and the previous accounts of Jesus calling his disciples. He chooses, they follow. There is no argument, or combat of wills, it is Jesus' will and desire that is utmost, and it supersedes that of everyone else's. When he commands the lame to walk, and the

unclean spirits to be cast out, when he commands us to follow him it supersedes our own desire and will, in fact in the call, comes the power to obey.

Praise God for his effectual Sovereign call, for without it none of us would be here, it is the Gospel and the call of Jesus that differentiates the disciples from the multitudes of followers that are seeking him for their own selfish gain, for their own comfort. If you are listening to this today, I pose a question to challenge you. Why do you attend church? Have you been a recipient of Jesus call to follow him and you are here because of that call? Even if it is inconvenient, or maybe you would rather be doing something else but instead you come to worship him corporately with your brothers and sisters because of your love for him is greater than your own personal desire. Or, are you attending services because it fills something in your life, you know you should be here so you are, not because you truly desire to be but because you feel that it is the right thing to do. Are you here, because of your love for your savior, or just to soothe your own conscious. Are you here because God called you to follow him, to gather and to worship, and you are faithfully answering that call, or are you like the nameless multitudes that followed Jesus, only seeking after him for your own purpose, hoping that he will grant you your needs and desires.

Now is the time, today is the day to stop pretending, to stop deluding yourself, to stop pretending to be religious and to put self aside and cling only to Jesus.