

## “Jesus Called to Him Those He Wanted”

### The Tenth in a Series on the Gospel of Mark

*Texts: Mark 3:7-19; Isaiah 43:1-7*

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Jesus came preaching that the critical moment in redemptive history had finally come. The kingdom of God had drawn near in his very person. As proof that this was the case, Jesus cast out demons, healed the sick, and called disciples to follow him. He even forgave sins. Soon huge crowds followed Jesus everywhere he went. But even as Jesus was preaching the good news about the kingdom of God, the self-righteous scribes and Pharisees were offended by almost everything Jesus did. Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners. Jesus and his disciples did not observe the fast as did the Pharisees. And Jesus healed on the Sabbath. Although Jesus outraged the scribes and Pharisees, his actions were indicative of the fact that he was Israel’s Messiah and the Son of God. Sadly, even though Jesus came to bring salvation to his people, the scribes and Pharisees were now conspiring with their political enemies—the Herodians—to find some excuse to put Jesus to death. Jesus came to bring salvation to God’s people. But it was becoming clear that Jesus’ mission would be opposed by those very people he came to save.

We are continuing our series on Mark’s gospel. This morning we enter a new section of Mark’s gospel—Mark 3:7-6:13. As we enter that phase of Jesus’ ministry known as the “later Galilean ministry,” we will learn that the complaints of local religious officials in Galilee have reached all the way to the ears of the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. The Sanhedrin, in turn, dispatches representatives to examine Jesus’ ministry and to find out what is going on in Galilee for themselves. Despite the increasing level of opposition to Jesus on the part of the local religious leaders and the presence of the big-wigs from Jerusalem, Jesus’ messianic mission will continue in earnest. Jesus will continue to call disciples, eventually choosing twelve men to be the foundation of a new Israel, which is the church. Jesus will also begin teaching about the kingdom of God using parables—which is a form of judgment upon unbelieving Israel, and is our Lord’s response to the rank unbelief on the part of the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus will also continue to perform miracles as a sign from God that he is who he claims to be. But things get so tense that the scribes and Pharisees will even accuse Jesus of being demon possessed and what in amounts to adding insult to injury, Jesus’ own family believes that he is insane. And yet all of this conflict is fulfilling the purposes of God and setting things in motion for our Lord’s final journey to Jerusalem, where Jesus will fulfill his messianic mission on a Roman cross and in a rich man’s tomb..

As we saw last time, Jesus was preaching about the kingdom of God, healing the sick and casting out demons in the area near Capernaum along the Sea of Galilee. Huge crowds followed him wherever he went. On one occasion, Jesus forgive a paralyzed man’s sins before healing him. This shocked everyone because only God can forgive sins. On another occasion, Jesus called a tax-collector to be a member of his inner-circle. And then Jesus and his disciples actually ate in the tax-collector’s home with other unclean sinners. This shocked the Pharisees who believed that sinners were ritually unclean and were to be regarded as Gentiles. Furthermore, Jesus and his disciples did not fast, unlike the followers of John, or the Pharisees, who fasted on Mondays and Thursdays. When asked about why neither he or his disciples fasted, Jesus replied that he was Israel’s bridegroom and that his presence with his people meant that this was a time a joy, not a time to fast. But even in these words, Jesus also hinted that a day of mourning was to come. He is already speaking of the cross.

About this time, Jesus' disciples were hungry and so they picked heads of grain on the Sabbath. Even though what they did not violate Scripture, the Pharisees nevertheless accused Jesus' disciples of breaking the fourth commandment by "reaping" on the day of rest. Jesus responded to their accusations by instructing the Pharisees about the true meaning of the Sabbath. The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. Although God intended the Sabbath to be a day of rest for our bodies and a day we set aside to worship our God and delight in the good things he gives to us, the Pharisees had so buried what Scripture said about the Sabbath under a pile of case law that the true meaning of the Sabbath was completely obscured. Under their direction, Sabbath observance had become a burden to God's people, not a joy. When Jesus claimed to Lord, even of the Sabbath, he is, in fact, claiming divine authority to interpret God's word correctly. This too must have shocked these self-righteous Bible scholars, who were now being told that they had completely missed the whole point of what Scripture said.

Jesus' claim to Lord of the Sabbath set the stage for yet another, more heated conflict with the Pharisees. When Jesus healed a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath, the Pharisees were watching and waiting, hoping that Jesus would do something so that they could accuse him of Sabbath-breaking, which would subject Jesus to the death penalty since they had already warned him that he was in violation of their tradition. Sure enough when Jesus healed this poor man on the Sabbath, the Pharisees went out and began plotting with the Herodians—their sworn political enemies—in order to find a way to kill Jesus. In light of this collaboration between enemies, it is clear that Jesus and his messianic ministry had been completely rejected by the religious leaders of Israel. Jesus will now conduct his mission in the face of unbelief, and the conflict with the Pharisees will only become more intense. Meanwhile, the Savior has come to redeem his people, but the multitudes don't care much about his teaching. They are only interested in the miracles. The scribes and Pharisees are already plotting against him. But Jesus will call his sheep, they will hear his voice, believe in him and repent of their sins. The kingdom of God has drawn near and men cannot stop it no matter how hard they try!

**A**s we move into this new section of Mark dealing with events with the latter part of his Galilean ministry, Mark describes how, as was his custom, Jesus withdraws to the wilderness for rest and prayer and to prepare for the next phase of his ministry. Despite the direct opposition from Israel's religious leaders, Jesus remains immensely popular with the people and so once again they seek him out and flock to him, even as he tries to escape from the crowds.<sup>1</sup>

In verse 7, Mark tells us that, "*Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the lake, and a large crowd from Galilee followed.*" It is important to point out that there is no hint in Mark's report that Jesus is withdrawing because he is afraid of the plotting of the Pharisees. Rather, Jesus returns to the wilderness so as to go about his father's business and complete his mission.<sup>2</sup> This is where Jesus goes to pray and rest. The wilderness is the place where Jesus called his first disciples—he's preparing to call more—and this is the place where Jesus has been teaching the multitudes who have come to him for healing. Our Lord's retreat into the wilderness is the sign that a new Israel is being created and that a new Exodus is about to begin. Sadly, however, the crowds are not as interested in Jesus' teaching as they are in Jesus' miraculous power. They seek Jesus out not because the kingdom has come or because God is bringing salvation to Israel, but because Jesus can heal them. When Jesus heads back into the wilderness, once again the crowds follow him. And Jesus will have compassion on them.

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<sup>1</sup> France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 152-153.

<sup>2</sup> Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 124.

Jesus' ministry has gone on for some weeks (perhaps months) and now we start to get a sense of how far and wide Jesus' reputation has spread. Jesus' notoriety is rather amazing in an age without modern communication. People throughout that entire region must have been talking about him and so the sick and suffering begin traveling great distances to seek him out. According to verse 8, "*When they heard all he was doing, many people came to him from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, and the regions across the Jordan and around Tyre and Sidon.*" The places Mark mentions are of some significance, indicating how far Jesus' reputation had spread. Judea and Jerusalem refer to Israel (the bulk of which lies to the south). Idumea is the region across the Jordan to the east and south, while the cities of Tyre and Sidon constitute the area along the northern border of Israel. Idumea (Trans-Jordan) is also the ancient land of the Edomites, which was now filled with who many people who were ethnic Jews, but who were not very faithful to the tenants of Judaism. The areas to the north were predominantly Gentile.

People throughout the entire region (Jew and Gentile) have heard of this new miracle-worker exorcist, named Jesus. He can cast out demons. He can heal the sick. And so while a large crowd from the Galilee region followed Jesus into the wilderness, Mark describes how other desperate people flocked to Jesus from all over the region.<sup>3</sup> Even the pagan Gentiles have heard of what Jesus was doing, and they too came to him just as Jews were doing, in order to seek relief from all manner of sickness, suffering, and demon possession. Even early on in his ministry it was starting to become clear that Jesus' mission would extend beyond the narrow confines of Israel. Jesus will be the Savior of the nations, not just of Israel. As Jesus told the shocked Pharisees in Matthew 8:11-12, "*I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*" The messianic age had dawned, and the Gentiles see God's glory in Israel and begin flocking to Israel's redeemer, while the Pharisees will come under his judgment.

The scene depicted by Mark is one which is not only becoming increasingly chaotic but is tragic as well. In words that ring of an eyewitness report,<sup>4</sup> Mark tells us in verses 9-10 that "*because of the crowd [Jesus] told his disciples to have a small boat ready for him, to keep the people from crowding him. For he had healed many, so that those with diseases were pushing forward to touch him.*" There were so many people that in order for Jesus to be able to preach to them all and heal the sick, Jesus had the disciples put him in a boat where he could move away from the shore so that they could keep some semblance of order. This is a scene in which desperate people are doing desperate things. Sin has not only brought about their suffering, but their sin also blinds them to the fact that Jesus can heal their diseases and ease their suffering, precisely because he came to deal with the root cause of all human suffering—sin—not just its symptoms (sickness). But this truth is sadly lost on the crowds who so desperately need help and Jesus is the only hope that many of them have.

Among those who sought out Jesus were those who were possessed by demons. As we noted before, the ancients—perhaps better than we—were able to distinguish between illness (such as epilepsy) and demon possession. In verses 11-12, Mark describes how "*whenever the evil spirits saw [Jesus], they fell down before him and cried out, 'You are the Son of God.'*" When the demons address Jesus as the Son of God, it is because that they know full-well who Jesus is, even while the scribes and Pharisees do not recognize

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<sup>3</sup> France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 154.

<sup>4</sup> Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 124.

him—a rather sad bit of irony. It is also the case that the demons address Jesus using his divine title as a means of attempting to control Jesus through a kind of incantation. In the ancient world it was thought to speak someone’s name with precise knowledge of their identity was to control them.<sup>5</sup> Since Jesus is the bearer of the Holy Spirit, the demons immediately recognize Jesus as the Son of God, indwelt by the blessed Holy Spirit. There such a great gulf between the Holy Spirit and the demonic that the demons cannot but help to recognize Jesus. In utter futility, they attempt to best him by speaking his divine title so as to control him.<sup>6</sup>

This explains why Jesus responds to them as he does. “*But he gave them strict orders not to tell who he was.*” Jesus solemnly commands the demons to be silent and not tell anyone of his true identity. Jesus’ messianic mission involves a precise and deliberate manner of self-revelation. Jesus wishes that his identity remain hidden until the proper time. Now is not the moment for Jesus to fully reveal himself. When Jesus speaks, the demons are bound to do as he commands, for it is they who are subject to him, not the reverse. It is not an accident that this conflict takes place in the wilderness, the same place where Jesus has already done combat with Satan and overcome him by not giving into Satan’s temptation when Jesus was hungry and thirsty. Jesus will fulfill his mission in his own time and own way, and the demons will not be able to thwart his plans or purposes.<sup>7</sup> But make no mistake about. They recognize Jesus, while ironically, the shepherds of Israel are so blinded by sin, they have no idea who Jesus is.

**A**nd so the time has now come for Jesus to establish a new Israel. He will complete his call of twelve disciples in preparation for the next stage of his ministry.

According to verses 13-19 of Mark 3, “*Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve—designating them apostles—that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons. These are the twelve he appointed: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter), James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means Sons of Thunder), Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.*”

There are a number of important things here worth noting in this commissioning of the twelve and the list of their names. Mark does not tell us on which mountain this took place, nor does he provide us with any of the details involved. Peter was certainly present, but must not have given any of the details of this to Mark. Despite the absence of detail, the whole account is loaded with Old Testament imagery. Jesus is obviously a New Moses (and covenant mediator), who leads his people up onto the mountain for what will amount to a very significant moment in his messianic mission. Jesus will form his church, as evident in the fact that he has come to create a new Israel and to lead them in a new Exodus as well. From Mark’s account, we cannot be sure if a group of men went up with Jesus and he then chose twelve from among them, or if only the twelve went up with him.<sup>8</sup> The latter seems far more likely since the number

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<sup>5</sup> Lane, The Gospel According to Mark, 130

<sup>6</sup> Lane, The Gospel According to Mark, 130.

<sup>7</sup> Lane, The Gospel According to Mark, 130-131.

<sup>8</sup> Cranfield, The Gospel According to Mark, 126.

twelve has such great theological significance in redemptive history.<sup>9</sup> What is clear is that Jesus takes the initiative and that he has full authority to summon men so that they drop everything and follow him.

The fact that Jesus calls twelve particular men and then equips them for service, definitely points us to the doctrine of election. From eternity past, God chooses those whom he will save and he then calls them to faith through the preaching of the gospel, before equipping them for service in the community of the faithful (the church). These twelve men were not asked if they wanted to follow Jesus. Jesus did not invite them nor plead with them. He summoned them by name. In fact, there is nothing in our gospels which would lead us to believe that these men were dissatisfied Jews who were seeking a new religion. Mark's report indicates that Peter, Andrew, James and John, were fishermen going about their business when Jesus walked up to them and called them by name to "follow him." And they did. Levi was going about his business (however shady) of collecting tolls when Jesus called him. He got up from his toll booth never to return. The same thing appears to be the case here as well. Jesus summoned these men up onto the mountain. The summons itself sets these men apart from all the other followers of Jesus and begins the process of preparing them for their ministry to follow. Indeed, throughout this entire account, we see God sovereignly calling and saving sinners. Had God not called these men by name, they would have perished in their sins and died in absolute obscurity as did millions of their compatriots.

We should also point out that Isaiah the prophet foretold that the salvation brought by Israel's Messiah would involve God's call of his people by name. As we read in our Old Testament lesson, Isaiah 43:1-7, *"But now, this is what the LORD says—he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior; I give Egypt for your ransom, Cush and Seba in your stead. Since you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I love you, I will give men in exchange for you, and people in exchange for your life. Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west. I will say to the north, 'Give them up!' and to the south, 'Do not hold them back.' Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth—everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."* This messianic prophecy will apply to the disciples whom Jesus now calls by name, and it will also apply to many of those Gentiles who flocked to see Jesus and who no doubt, will become believers in Israel's Messiah when he preached the good news of the kingdom.

Having been chosen by Jesus and summoned up unto the mountain, these men are also equipped for their mission, which is an extension of that of their master—preaching and casting out demons. In Mark 6:7, Jesus will send them out to do precisely this, but until that time, Jesus will prepare them for what lies ahead. Mark simply puts it this way—that *they might be with him*. As disciples of Jesus, they will learn from him so that they can go out and effectively perform their mission, which will carry over into a permanent function within the church after the day of Pentecost.<sup>10</sup> As Jesus' disciples, the twelve will be able to bear witness to all of the things Jesus said and did—just as Peter has done and which lies behind the Gospel of Mark. This will especially become the case when they are witnesses of Christ's

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<sup>9</sup> Lane, The Gospel According to Mark, 132.

<sup>10</sup> France, The Gospel of Mark, 159.

resurrection.<sup>11</sup> This means that these men are not schemers, dreamers, liars or con-artists, who turn the Jesus of history into the Christ of faith. These men will be able to bear witness to what they have seen and heard. As John puts it in the opening verses of his first epistle, *“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete.”* These men are summoned by Jesus so that they can be sent to preach the gospel. They will see and learn from Jesus so that when the time comes they will bear witness of him.

One last thing we need to notice is that Jesus summons twelve disciples, not ten, not eleven, not thirteen, but twelve. The number twelve obviously has a very deep and important redemptive-historical significance. Through the call of twelve disciples, Jesus is creating a new Israel and, in effect, these men represent twelve tribes of a new people, a people which will include both Jew and Gentile and will extend far beyond the narrow confines of Israel. Jesus will indeed visit this people with salvation. He will call his sheep by name. He will lead them in a new Exodus. And it is these twelve men, who, as we have seen, will extend his mission beyond anything they could ever conceive.

The list of disciples as we find here is standard throughout the New Testament. We learn that Simon is Peter and that his name tops the list. We learn that Jesus gave the nickname “Boanerges” (sons of thunder) to James and John, and that Matthew was earlier identified as Levi. We learn that one of those whom Jesus chose, Judas, would eventually betray the Lord. While most of the names were pretty common first-century Jewish names, “Simon the Zealot” stands out as one who was particularly zealous for the things of the Lord. Judas Iscariot, means “Judas, the man from Karioth,” and he will play a very prominent role in what follows, something no one would ever expect, probably not even Judas. Therefore, these men constitute a group of twelve disciples (apostles) who are sovereignly called by their master to serve him. These men will proclaim that gospel which will establish the new Israel which will be composed of people from every race and tribe and tongue under heaven. These men, known throughout the gospels simply as “the twelve,” have no idea what awaits them as this drama unfolds.

The application we should draw from this passage is very straightforward and simple.

**T**When Jesus called the twelve, he began to create a new Israel and begin to lead his people in a new Exodus. Through the proclamation of the gospel that Jesus taught these twelve men and which they’ve proclaimed to us through God’s word, God has called each one of us by name. We come from different races, we have different backgrounds, and we occupy many stations of life. But make no mistake about it. God has called each one of us by name to place our trust in Jesus Christ. Like the twelve, we leave everything behind and we follow our new master as he leads us through the wilderness of this present evil age as we make our way to the heavenly city. We’ve been called by name despite the fact we are unworthy of this call and even though we are dead in sin. We possess the unspeakable free gift of the forgiveness of our sins, because God has been merciful to us and sent his son to die for our sins and to fulfill all righteousness.

Like the twelve, when we were called, we gladly leave all behind and follow our new master, who loves

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<sup>11</sup> Cranfield, The Gospel According to Mark, 128.

us and gave himself for us. We embrace all of his promises by faith. We repent of our many sins and leave our old way of life behind. We obey our Savior's commands because our hearts are filled with gratitude because of all that he has done for us. And because we have been called by name, we know that just as his journey took him to the cross and to the empty tomb, so too our journey will take us to the heavenly city, where we will know joy beyond measure. And all of this is because Jesus called to him those he wanted. And just as they were called by name, so are we. For he is our God, and we are his people. He knows us, and now we know him. Amen!