

First Baptist Church Merritt Island
Executive Pastor Carey Dean
May 21, 2023
Who Are You Following?
Mark 3:7-12

Mark 3:1-12 1 Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there with a withered hand. 2 And they watched Jesus, to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. 3 And he said to the man with the withered hand, "Come here." 4 And he said to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent. 5 And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. 6 The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him. 7 Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the sea, and a great crowd followed, from Galilee and Judea 8 and Jerusalem and Idumea and from beyond the Jordan and from around Tyre and Sidon. When the great crowd heard all that he was doing, they came to him. 9 And he told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, lest they crush him, 10 for he had healed many, so that all who had diseases pressed around him to touch him. 11 And whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, "You are the Son of God." 12 And he strictly ordered them not to make him known.

We read these verses, but do we understand the massive earthquake-effect Jesus was having in all of Israel? I mean all of Israel. The earthquake is spreading in all four directions from the shores of Galilee and Jesus stands as its epicenter. The religious leaders are threatened. The crowds are desperate. The unclean spirits are trembling.

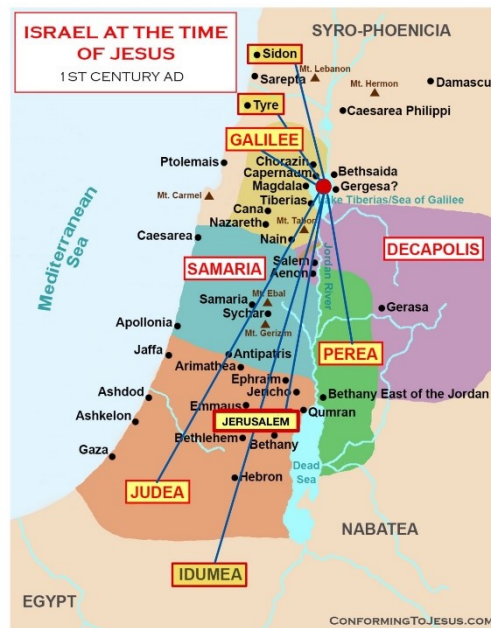
At every turn, he is revealing and proving an authority that no one had ever known before. Jesus taught with qualitatively different authority, of which had never been heard. He healed with an authority over every affliction, even of leprosy. He commanded even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him.

The Gospel of Mark helps us to understand just how far the fame of Jesus has spread in such a short amount of time. Just as a frame of reference, the population of the Galilee area alone in the time of Jesus would be approximately 400,000 people. We read words like "crowd" and think in terms of hundreds of people, not thousands upon thousands.

Mark 3:7-8

7 Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the sea, and a great crowd followed, from Galilee and Judea 8 and Jerusalem and Idumea and from beyond the Jordan and from around Tyre and Sidon. When the great crowd heard all that he was doing, they came to him.

Look at this map indicating the places Mark tells us where people were coming from to see Jesus.



The word and work of Jesus impacted both Jew and Gentile throughout the land:

- From Idumea filled with a mixture of Jew and Gentile.
- From the heavily Jewish populated areas of Judea and Jerusalem.
- From the Perea region east of the Jordan filled with both Jew and Gentile.
- And from the coastal Northwest area, Tyre and Sidon, which were primarily Gentile territories.

All are headed to one place, Galilee, to see this man who speaks, heals, and casts out unclean spirits. So, in this relatively small area, thousands upon thousands are gathered.

Starting next week, Mark turns a new corner in his Gospel with Jesus selecting, appointing, and equipping 12 men as his disciples. Before we learn about the disciples following Jesus, there are some important lessons for us to learn from the religious leaders, crowds, and even from the unclean spirits. They followed Jesus too but just did so in an imperfect and deficient way.

Let us look at how the religious leaders followed Jesus:

1. The Religious Leaders

6 The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

They were following Jesus to destroy Him, not to believe. The religious leaders give us our first warning when we follow Jesus: Motive

Self-Righteousness follows Jesus with predetermined conclusions.

We find in Mark 2:1-3:6 the Scribes and Pharisees are an important part of the five scenes of growing conflict. These Scribes and Pharisees aren't just innocent bystanders. The concern they have is not a small one. They are part of the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem sent on a mission to observe and interrogate this man making outlandish claims, performing incredible miracles, and creating a stir among the people.

The religious leaders left Jerusalem to follow Jesus with a right question, "This man is doing things only the Messiah could do. Is He the Messiah or a blasphemer?" The problem is they also left Jerusalem with a predetermined answer. "He is a blasphemer."

This hit me hard. How many times do I ask Jesus a question and at the same time hold firmly that He can only answer in only one way....my way! In this, I am no longer asking a question to Him but making a demand of Him.

I confess to you that I can quickly and easily become the Pharisee. Here are things I see in the Pharisees and Scribes and sadly, I know these to be true at moments in my own life.

- Self-righteousness refuses to hear the Truth.
- Self-righteousness is blind to the Person of Truth.
- Self-righteousness says, "I know all things. I am above all things. I am my own righteousness."

We are to follow Jesus with questions asked in humility, not in pride. Humility says, "I don't know, but You do. Your name is above every other name. You are my life and righteousness." What questions are you asking Jesus today? Are you humbly asking with ears willing to listen? Or are you pridefully asking with your own predetermined conclusions?

The crowds also followed Jesus imperfectly.

2. The Crowds

9 And he told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, lest they crush him, 10 for he had healed many, so that all who had diseases pressed around him to touch him.

One thing we can learn from the crowds is:

Distorted understanding presses upon Jesus with flawed expectations.

Some followed only a Medicine Man, not a Savior. Some followed only a good teacher, not the Eternal Word. Some followed only the desire for an earthly Autocrat, not a Suffering Servant. autocrat: An absolute sovereign; a monarch who holds and exercises the powers of government by claim of absolute right, not subject to restriction.

I want to pause here because I don't want to be the Pharisee as I describe how these massive crowds followed Jesus. Many experienced tormenting afflictions and disabilities in their lives. They are desperate for relief and the thought of being healed by this man became a newfound found hope.

Jesus met these hurting people with great compassion, mercy, and grace. Where Jesus is present, He changes things. He transforms things. He resurrects things. He doesn't stand as an observer to our lives. He enters every corner and closet of our life to redeem it for His glory and our good. His compassion and love toward us never change. That is who Jesus is! He healed these people, one by one, from their suffering. They are not unlike the woman with the blood issue that desired to touch the hem of His garment, believing that her healing would occur.

But just like these crowds, we tend to try to understand things from the outside-in. But Jesus deals with our lives from the inside-out. He is most concerned with our hearts in need of His redeeming love. We cannot overcome sin, so He came to die in our place so that His resurrected life can be ours. He came so that you can be forgiven and redeemed to a new life in Him.

It seems like the more miracles Jesus did, the more distorted the crowds view of Jesus became. Like the crowds, we see a little and think we know the whole. What first began as the crowds amazement of hearing the preaching of Jesus quickly became the astonishment of seeing his miracles. Faith comes from hearing Jesus not seeing miracles!

When we move away from hearing the Shepherd's voice, we are in danger of distorting who Jesus is to fit our desired outcomes. In our flawed expectations, we begin to seek Jesus for what He can do instead of who He is.

Here is the real question, Which "Jesus" are you following? What I mean by that is, are you following a distorted version of Jesus that you expect Him to be or the true and living Jesus that He says He is?

Let us not be the fool. There is only one Jesus. Faith in our created versions of Jesus, as our medicine man, mere teacher of life lessons, or fixer of undesired circumstances will have unholy expectations ending in deep disappointment, emptiness, and anger. But faith placed in Jesus, who is the only Son of God, will have holy expectations giving eternal satisfaction, peace, and joy.

Our passage this morning ends with another group of people being impacted by the presence of Jesus. We see "unclean spirits" and immediately think of demons. And we

are correct to do so, but those demons are coming to Jesus within and tormenting people. People are coming to Galilee from Idumea, Judah, Jerusalem, Perea, Tyros and Sidon. Some traveling over 120 miles while possessed with a demon's intent to thwart Jesus' plan of redemption. Don't forget people are involved!

3. The Unclean Spirits

11 And whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, "You are the Son of God." 12 And he strictly ordered them not to make him known.

The Greek verbs inside these two verses are all imperfect active indicative. That means these demonic confrontations against Jesus is not occurring just once but repeatedly. Satan tempted Jesus in every way for 40 days at the beginning of His ministry. Satan's lead line was, "If you are the Son of God then..." He failed so the job now fell to his workers.

The demons are following the lead of their boss, Satan, and trying to undermine, expose, and bring down the Authority of Jesus at every chance possible. With every demonic attack, Jesus proved His authority to be greater and freed the people from the power of the enemy.

I believe two things are happening in this repeated confrontation.

1. The religious leaders are trying to destroy the man, but Satan and his army are trying to destroy Salvation's plan.
2. They approach Jesus ready to battle, but when the unclean spirits approach the Holy Spirit within the Son of God.

Their eyes fully comprehend Who is before them. Their knees buckle and fall to the ground before their Superior. Their words cannot speak anything but pure truth and declare, "You are the Son of God."

Philippians 2:9-11

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The words of confession, "You are the Son of God" is the only right response as You encounter Jesus, but this is said out of fear by the demons, not love of a follower. Mark's love started his Gospel with the declaration, "Jesus Christ, the Son of God." God the Father's love said it at Jesus' baptism. Peter answered in love and confession to Jesus' question, "Who do You say that I am?" The Centurion's love confessed it with full conviction at the foot of the cross.

Yet the demons say the same, “You are the Son of God.” It is not a matter of believing, for even the demons believe. Both followers and enemies of Christ believe. The difference is love. If love is not energizing the confession, it can only come from a place of fear.

The truth is Jesus is and forever will be the Son of God. Say this with me out of believing and loving Jesus:

Colossians 1:15-18

Jesus, You are the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by You all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through You and for You. 17 You are before all things, and in You all things hold together. 18 You are the head of the body, the church. Jesus, You are the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything You might be preeminent.

To believe and love the Son of God is to fall down before Him in worship. To believe and be an enemy of the Son of God is to fall down before Him in fear.

Believing without love falls down before Jesus with fear-filled confession.

A story from when I was little. My dad taught me how to ride a bike. One day I was at the top of the hill and there was only one tree at the bottom. His last words before he pushed me off, “Don’t hit the tree.” Guess what I did? Say it together, “I hit the tree.”

- Self-Righteousness follows Jesus with predetermined conclusions.
- Distorted understanding presses upon Jesus with flawed expectations.
- Believing without love falls down before Jesus in fearful confession.

We can’t follow Him with predetermined conclusions, flawed expectations and spout off useless confessions. But I don’t want you to leave this morning with you only hearing how NOT to follow Jesus. We ultimately learn how to follow Jesus from Jesus Himself.

He leads and we follow in obedience, surrender, and fellowship. Here is the belief statement I want you to keep and treasure: Faith follows Jesus as the great I AM.

Jesus says, “I Am...”

1. I am the bread of life. (John 6:35)
2. I am the light of the world. (John 8:12)
3. I am the door. (John 10:9)
4. I am the good shepherd. (John 10:11)
5. I am the resurrection and life. (John 11:25)
6. I am the way and the truth, and the life. (John 14:6)
7. I am the vine and you are the branches. (John 15:5)