

The crowds, the evil spirits and the 12

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Preacher: David MacPherson

[0 : 00] There's one thing to mention before we turn to our passage.

As was mentioned last week, but just a reminder, we're in the course of putting together a congregational directory. It's a very useful resource to just know where people live and contact details and what have you.

And this year, it's going to be a pictorial directory. So that involves pictures being taken. A lot were taken last week, and that will continue today and next Sunday as well.

So I would encourage you to participate in that. First of all, of course, providing your contact details so that you're in the directory, and then also to have your picture taken.

That's downstairs in the hall. And obviously, the more information we have, the more useful that will be. So just a wee plug for that. Let's turn then to the passage we read there in Mark's gospel, in Mark chapter 3.

[1 : 07] We're going to think about what we find there from verse 7 through to verse 19. And the passage begins, or the part of the chapter that we're considering begins with these words.

Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the lake. And as I was reading this passage, and as I was reading this passage, and kind of paused there, before reading what continues, I began to picture in my mind the scene.

I wonder what picture these words conjured up in your mind. And Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the lake. And for me, at any rate, that the picture conjured up, if we leave it there, if we go no further, is a very idyllic scene.

Jesus and his disciples heading to the lake. The sun is shining. The warmth is being enjoyed. It's hot, but not too hot. The sky is blue. They're walking along the sandy shore of the lake. The water ripples over their feet.

[2 : 16] They may be brought provisions for the day. Some loaves to eat. Some fish to grill over a small fire. Jesus and his friends.

Those he has gathered around him. They can walk. They can talk. They can laugh. They can chill. What a beautiful scene that is pictured as we allow our imagination to somewhat run riot on the basis of these few words.

Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the lake. Well, that may be a pretty picture, but of course it's made up. It's not what actually happened.

The reality was very different. Because in what follows, we discover what the reality was for Jesus as he withdrew with his disciples to the lake.

And the reality is that a large crowd followed. And this crowd that we're spoken of are described as hemming in on Jesus, crowding him, pushing forward, demanding of him.

[3 : 21] And then we're told of the evil spirits, and they cry out when they see Jesus. And the scene is far from idyllic as it's described to us.

But then as we continue reading, there's perhaps a measure of calm as they're able to make their way up the mountainside.

Jesus with his disciples. There in verse 13 we read, Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted. It was quite a day.

If indeed it was all on the same day, we don't know if the intention is us to understand this as following a given day. Maybe we'll take it as if that is the case.

And certainly if it was, well, quite a day for Jesus and his disciples. But what I want to do this morning is to explore this passage. These verses from verse 7 to verse 19.

[4 : 23] And I want to do so from the angle of the three distinct groups encountered by Jesus and to whom Jesus related to in a particular way.

There are the crowds that we read of there from verse 7. But then also we have the evil spirits of whom we're also told and who also have an encounter with Jesus.

And then we have in the third place the twelve, those that he appointed. In verse 14, he appointed twelve, designating them apostles.

So three distinct groups, the crowds, the evil spirits, and the twelve. What I want us to do is to notice how in different ways Jesus relates to these three groups.

How to each of them he demonstrates his authority. And also in some measure how each of these groups responds to Jesus.

[5 : 30] Now we'll not follow for each of the groups these different aspects necessarily in the same order. But we want to draw out some of this for each of the groups. Identify.

If I had to try and capture each encounter with one expression, and it's a difficult thing to do, it might be along the lines of the crowds loved by Jesus, the evil spirits silenced by Jesus, and the twelve called by Jesus.

Now there's much more than can be captured in just a few words, but that maybe gives some sense of what is going on with these three groups that we're presented with by Mark.

So let's think of them. First of all, the crowds loved by Jesus. Now why would I focus on this in particular from the passage before us?

What evidence do we have of Jesus' love for the crowds? Of course, it's not enough just to say, well, of course he loved them because that's what Jesus is like. But what do we find in the passage that would give substance to that claim?

[6 : 38] Well, in the midst of this section from verse 7, we're told of the manner in which Jesus attended to many in the crowds.

In verse 10, we're told that all these crowds who were crowding in on him and pushing in on him and making life in many ways very uncomfortable for him, we're told that he healed many.

Many who came to him with diseases and ailments of one kind or another of body and mind were healed by Jesus. In the midst of the pushing and the scrambling of what sometimes must have seemed more of a mob than a crowd, Jesus is moved to compassion by the plight of the sick and broken.

He sees their broken bodies, their physical pain, their broken spirits, their desperation to be restored, to be healed, and he loves them.

And he brings to many healing of body and mind, and as a result for many also restoration to family and society.

[7 : 50] And as he heals, as he shows the love that he bears towards the crowds, in all their diversity and in all their unreasonable demanding of him, as he heals, he also demonstrates his authority over disease and sickness, over body and mind.

Jesus needs only to speak the word, and men and women are made whole. They're healed, they're restored. Indeed, Mark, in the account that he gives us here, seems to suggest that it was sufficient for the disease to just touch Jesus, to experience his healing power and authority.

In verse 10 we read, For he had healed many, so that those with diseases were pushing forward to touch him. Now Mark doesn't give us the outcome of that touch, but it seems implicit.

And of course we know that on subsequent occasions we're told of the manner in which even those who touched him did indeed experience healing and restoration.

If we just notice on one occasion where we are told that that was so, in Mark's gospel in chapter 6 and in verse 56 we read, Again, it's a kind of summary of his ministry into villages, towns or countryside.

[9 : 15] They placed the sick in the marketplaces. They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched him were healed. His authority over disease and illness of body and mind.

He loves the crowds. But how do the crowds respond to Jesus and his love for them?

Evidence in the way suggested. Well, the crowds largely, and of course the nature of a crowd is you can't say that this would have been true of all of them. There would have been all manner of people and all manner of opinions and responses within that crowd.

But nonetheless, I think we can say in general terms that the crowds largely are interested in only one thing. They are interested in what Jesus can do for what they perceive to be their greatest needs.

For many that was their physical well-being, their physical restoration. The crowds seem in great measure to be largely ambivalent to the good news that he brings from heaven.

[10:23] Jesus has made it clear already that this is his great task, to proclaim the good news of God. But the crowds largely seem disinterested in the good news that he brings.

For most, the call to repentance that lay at the heart of his message is unheard or certainly unheeded. Jesus is gripped by the urgent need of their bodies, yes, but of their souls.

But many of them can't see beyond their bodies, beyond their material, physical needs. But we don't find that Jesus rebukes them. He doesn't scold them.

He doesn't ignore them. He doesn't withdraw from them, frustrated by their folly and by their blindness. No, he heals many of them.

He loves them. But do they love him back? Do they listen to him? Do they heed his call? Do they put their trust in him? The crowds are interested in Jesus in the measure that he can do for them what they want him to do.

[11:33] Jesus needs to conform to their agenda and to their priorities and their perceived needs. Those were the crowds a couple of thousand years ago.

But is it so different today? What about you? Do you share something of the perspective and the priorities of the crowds? More interested, more concerned in the material, the physical, what you can see and touch, what you can eat, what you can earn, what you can build, what you can buy, your body, and how you can keep it pain-free and fit and healthy.

More interested in these things that have their place, of course, than in the spiritual, than in your soul more concerned for body than soul. How much attention do you give to the care of your body, vis-a-vis the care of your soul?

As we thought, even as we prayed, what shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul? The crowds don't seem greatly concerned about their soul.

And that may be true of you. Jesus still loves you. He's still moved to compassion by your physical and material needs. He is still interested in what you perceive to be your great needs.

[13:00] But his greatest concern and his most wonderful provision is for your soul, for your eternal well-being and eternal destiny. The crowds loved by Jesus.

But then we also encounter this second group. We are calling them a group. They are characters with personality.

The evil spirits, fallen angels, silenced by Jesus. In verse 11 we're told of this encounter between them and Jesus. Whenever the evil spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, You are the Son of God.

But he gave them strict orders not to tell who he was. These evil spirits presumably occupying the bodies and employing the vocal faculties of their victims, if that is what we should call them.

What do the evil spirits do in the presence of Jesus? What are we told? Well, the passage identifies three significant actions on the part of the evil spirits as they're confronted by Jesus.

[14:12] The very first thing that we're told is that they saw him. Whenever the evil spirits saw him, they see. You might say, well, that's not of great significance. Of course they do. He was passing by and so they saw him.

It seems that the word that Mark uses here is one that implies something beyond simply physical recognition or sight.

It points to something deeper than that. They see Jesus. They recognize Jesus. They grasp who he is that stands before them.

And because they see in that way, we then see what follows. They fall down. They fell down before him. The crowds are pictured as falling upon Jesus, demanding of Jesus.

Not falling before him, not prostrate before him, but how different with evil spirits. They fall down before him. And they cry out.

[15:15] That's the third thing they do. They cry out. And of course, of interest is what is it that they say? Many cried out, no doubt. But what do they say? They cry out, you are the Son of God.

And in our account, in Mark's account thus far, it's only the Father at the baptism of Jesus who has so identified his Son. But the evil spirits here, it would seem without exception, recognize and declare him to be who he is.

They declare the divine identity of Jesus, you are the Son of God. They know who he is. They know that he is the one who in ages past they rebelled against.

They know that he is the one who cast them out of heaven. They know, they recognize him, and they tremble. But what does Jesus do?

And in so doing, reveal his authority over them and the realm of evil that they represent. Well, we're told very clearly that he silences them. He gave them, we're told in verse 12, strict orders not to tell who he was.

[16:34] He silences them. And again, the word that is employed, this verb translated, giving strict orders not to speak or not to tell, is a word that speaks of his divine authority over evil.

Notice that Mark takes it as a given that the evil spirits obey. There's no need for Mark to add in his account. You know, and they told no one who he was.

Mark doesn't need to say, well, this is what Jesus did. He gave them strict orders and they obeyed. No need. No need to add that to the account. It's understood.

It's a given. And of course, they obeyed. The strict orders that they are given. Their obedience was pained, no doubt.

It was certainly pleasureless. But it is immediate and it is total. Because Jesus enjoys absolute authority over the demonic realm, over every principality and power.

[17:36] And notice also that Jesus, in silencing the evil spirits, is also exercising his authority over the course of his own ministry and mission.

He is the one who is determining the times and the places. His path is traced, as it had been from eternity, traced to Calvary, traced to the cross.

But it is Jesus who determines and takes each step on that path. When he wills and as he wills, as he determines.

He will not be slowed down and he will not be rushed by any. Jesus silences the evil spirits. We think of that reality as it's presented to us.

What would I encourage you to take from this demonstration of Jesus' absolute authority over the evil spirits as he silences them?

[18:37] Well, let me suggest two things that it would be important for you to draw from this for yourself. First of all, I would say this. Be encouraged. Be encouraged by this reality that is presented to us here that our Lord reigns.

He reigns over all that is dark and evil and wicked. No one, no power seen or unseen, can frustrate his gracious and loving purposes for his people and for his church.

No one can escape his justice. No one can, unless he permits, even raise a voice of protest or rebellion. He silences the evil spirits.

We live in a world where evil appears so often to reign. Where evil is anything but silent. But be assured that at the word of command of the Son of God, all are silent.

Of course, that leaves us somewhat perplexed. And we acknowledge that perplexity. And it leaves us perplexed because we say, well, why doesn't he silence evil in all its manifestations today?

[19:53] Why? I don't know the answer to that question. But I do trust in the one who does all things well and orders all things, even evil, for the good of his own and the fulfilling of his purposes.

And so we can be encouraged that in our Savior we have won with absolute authority over even the realms of evil.

So be encouraged. So be encouraged. But also, how could we not also draw out from this reality the need to be warned? To put it very simply, don't mess with Jesus.

Don't mess with Jesus. Don't mess with the one who knows and who exercises such authority. In the silencing of the evil spirits, we have, in a sense, a foreshadowing of the final conflict between Christ and the forces of hell.

And we are reminded that when heaven and hell collide, there can be only one winner. When all who are evil are summoned before God, their mouths are shut and their tongues are silent.

[21:08] And so it will be on the day of judgment. The wicked, all those who have failed to heed the call of Jesus to repent and believe, and might it not be that many of the very crowds that we have spoken of here will be among them.

They will stand silent as eternal sentence is pronounced. No protest will be heard. No appeals presented or entertained. All that will be heard is the sound of silence.

The silence of those who acknowledge the absolute authority and impeccable justice of the one before whom they stand condemned. Silenced.

Just like the evil spirits by the lakeside at Capernaum. The crowds loved by Jesus. The evil spirits silenced by Jesus.

But then we turn to the twelve. The twelve called by Jesus. And the scene changes. From the lakeside were transported to the mountains.

[22 : 14] The crowds of thin were left, it would seem, with Jesus and the twelve. And what are we told that happens on the mountain? Well, let's read what it says there in verse 13.

Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted. And then in few words, we're given this summary of the call that is extended and how the disciples respond to it.

Indeed, in these few words, we're given a wealth of insight into Jesus' call of his disciples. And out of that wealth, let me just note and highlight three aspects of this call of the twelve that we can draw out from the passage.

I think the most telling aspect of this call that we can't but acknowledge and recognize is that this is a sovereign call on the part of Jesus.

But it's also, and this is less evident in the reading, but let me in a moment just develop this idea that as well as being a sovereign call, it's a creative call, and also an intimate call, a personal call.

[23 : 29] Let's think of these three aspects of the twelve called by Jesus. First of all, a sovereign call. The language is very clear and stresses this with such clarity.

Jesus called to him those he wanted. It's all of Jesus. He called to himself those he wanted.

It would be difficult in such few words to express it more tellingly as demonstrating the authority of Jesus in this encounter. The initiative is all of Jesus.

Now, we already noted, I think, a few weeks ago when we were thinking about this matter, no doubt when Jesus called James and John or Matthew. And we may mention the fact how at the time it would have been usual for disciples who were interested in learning more of the Torah to choose a rabbi who would teach them.

It was the disciples who would determine who they would follow or who they would sit under and be taught by or instructed by. But with Jesus, it's altogether different.

[24 : 43] He is the one who calls his disciples, the ones he wants, the ones he has determined to call. He calls and they follow.

As I was struck by the starkness of that reality, the words that came to my mind were the words of a chorus that we sometimes sing, or certainly I remember years ago singing often, I have decided to follow Jesus.

And as I thought about the words of that chorus, I began to wonder about the disciples. And I wondered what the disciples would have said to family or friends to explain this newfound allegiance to Jesus.

What would they have said if they had been asked, well, what's this business of you guys with Jesus? What would they have said? I wonder if they would have said, I have decided to follow Jesus.

Or rather, would they have said something along the lines of, He called me. He called me and I follow. Now, don't misunderstand me.

[25 : 53] I'm not denying there is truth in the testimony of a believer who can declare, I have decided to follow Jesus. Yes, that is language we can legitimately use.

But that decision that we do make is subsequent to and contingent on the sovereign and authoritative prerogative of the one who both calls and who enables those called to respond to His gracious call on their lives.

He called and they came. Two thousand years down the road and nothing has changed in that regard. It is a sovereign call, but we can also call it a creative call.

In what sense? In verse 14, we're told that Jesus, at the very beginning of the verse, we're told that He appointed twelve. These two words I want to just focus in on for a moment.

Appointed twelve. And both are significant and we'll look at them both and in order. So first of all, this word that we find here, He appointed.

[27 : 02] The English word there, appointed, translates the Greek verb to make or to bring into existence. Very common word, to make.

In fact, it is the verb that is used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, to translate the Hebrew word in Genesis 1 verse 1.

Genesis 1 verse 1. In the beginning God created or made the heavens and the earth. This is the word that Jesus uses here that is used describing what Jesus did.

He appointed twelve. He made twelve. You can understand why it seems peculiar and why made might not seem a suitable word.

Hence, appointed. And it's valid, it's legitimate to use, of course, that word. But what a peculiar word to use. He made twelve. I wonder if there is significance in the language that Mark uses.

[28 : 03] Is it perhaps the case that these twelve are spoken of in these terms because these twelve represent God's new creation? God is doing a new thing.

He is creating His church, His community of the called. Of those called out by Him to belong to Him. And discipleship and membership of God's new community is not so much about what we can do for God, but of what God is making of us.

New creatures in Christ. He made twelve. But that's also significant, that it was twelve that He chose to make.

Certainly as He begins, as He lays the foundations. Here too, there is a message. The twelve, and this isn't simply fanciful speculation in other parts of the New Testament.

It's clear that there is this intended symbolism, the twelve representing the twelve tribes of Israel.

This inauspicious gathering on a hillside outside Capernaum is all about Jesus constituting a new spiritual Israel made up of all those called by Him and to Him.

[29 : 23] And the call of Jesus remains a creative call. God is in the business of making all things new. You are called to be a new creation.

And He is the one who is making that new creation in you. A sovereign and creative call, but also an intimate call. Jesus called the disciples to Him.

Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to Him those He wanted. The disciples are called to Jesus. Jesus is the sole and exclusive subject of the call.

And this is reiterated in the twofold description of discipleship that follows. When we read there in verse 14, that they, why were they called?

That they might be with Him and that they might be sent by Him. There in a nutshell, what discipleship is all about, to be with Jesus and to be sent by Jesus.

[30 : 26] It's an intimate call. It's a personal call. It is a call to Himself. It is a call to relationship. It is a call to friendship. It is a call to accompaniment.

To be with Jesus. This is our delight. And indeed, it is our ultimate destiny as disciples to be with Jesus. As we look into what is our destiny, our happy destiny, we're reminded of the assuring words that Jesus directed to His disciples as He prepared them for His departure from earth.

In John chapter 14, verse 3, we have these words recorded, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

That you may be where I am. This is our destiny. This is our calling. To be with Jesus. But as we noted, it's a twofold calling.

To be with Jesus and to be sent by Jesus. Jesus sent to speak about Him. Sent to proclaim the good news concerning Jesus.

[31 : 39] And sent to act in His name. To have authority to drive out demons. Whose authority? Well, the authority of the one who sends. To act in His name, under His and by His authority.

This call that is extended is this personal call. To be with Him and to be sent by Him. And come to me remains the call of Jesus today.

Come to me. Follow me. As we've described in a very fleeting way, the nature of this call and of Christian discipleship.

I wonder, does this describe your discipleship? Being with Jesus and being sent by Jesus. This is your calling.

The crowds, the evil spirits, and the twelve. Where do you stand? Where do you stand before the one who loves you? Before the one who will ultimately and definitively silence all evil and all evildoers?

[32 : 49] The one who calls you to Him, to be with Him, and to be sent by Him. Where do you stand before Him? Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your Son. We thank you for Jesus. We thank you that He is the one who enjoys and exercises all authority in heaven and on earth.

We thank you that even in what we read of His encounters with those recorded here in the passage that we have read, we are witnesses to His authority.

And we pray that as we observe, we would not only be observers. As we consider perhaps from the comfort of distance, that we would be reminded that this is the Jesus who we have to deal with.

He is the one who calls us to be with Him, to be sent by Him. And we pray that that would be our great desire, that that would be our constant delight to be with Jesus, to be sent by Jesus, to speak of Jesus, and to act in His authority and in His power.

[34 : 01] And we pray these things in His name. Amen. Amen. Amen.