

A Study of Mark's Gospel

Week Four

Mark 3:13-4:8

Day One

13 Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. 14 He appointed twelve — designating them apostles—that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach 15 and to have authority to drive out demons.

v. 13 – Jesus called to Him “those He wanted.” Not everyone was invited, but all those who were invited came. It’s also clear that Jesus called them **up** to the mountain. Any time you accept a call from Jesus, you move up. Jesus calls us “up” to Him, but very often the way up is by going down.

For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? (Matthew 16:25-27).

Jesus willed then and wills now certain people to fulfill specific roles He had for them. It wasn't a matter of these people choosing Jesus, but of Jesus choosing them. In this verse, the men's duty was to respond to the call. The same is true today. **Are you responding to the call of Jesus on your life? Are you fulfilling the purpose He has for you?**

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit — fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name (John 15:16).

vs. 14&15 – Jesus chose twelve, which of course corresponds to the number of tribes in Israel. I remember the number twelve being the number of government (I have not done a lot of reference to the meaning of numbers in my studies.) Perhaps this signified the fact that Jesus was shifting the attention away from tribes and heritage of Israel to calling and purpose for all the people of God. These twelve men had something to do and what they did would build the Church. The same is true for you. Do what God intended for you to do, even if it is outside the church walls, and you will help build His church.

Jesus gave these men power to declare His word and to drive out evil spirits. It seems that to do one without the other would have been incomplete. Preaching without dealing with the opposition of the devil in people's lives is self-defeating, like putting water in a bucket with holes. Dealing with evil without establishing the foundation of the Word only amounts to social work. Jesus empowered His apostles to do both and we should consider that standard operating procedure for the modern church as well.

What does the word “apostle” mean? It simply means “sent forth one.” I don't think Jesus was establishing an office or position in the Church. He was simply establishing that there were some whom He designated as mobile agents with a special task of establishing His kingdom in certain areas. That means there are still apostles today, or

there should be apostles today. I have heard elaborate teaching on the roles of apostles and the designation for teaching apostles, apostles of the Lamb (the original twelve), governing apostles and establishing apostles. I think that's too complex. Anyone who is "sent forth" to do a task is an apostle of Jesus. I am an apostle to Africa; it is my duty and call to work there. That doesn't entitle me to use the word "apostle" in front of my name as part of my title. It is simply my function.

Day Two

16 These are the twelve he appointed: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); 17 James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means Sons of Thunder); 18 Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot 19 and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

vs. 16&17 – Jesus changed the names of some of His disciples. Why? Perhaps it was to affirm them in the traits they would need to do His will. For instance, there was a successful tennis coach who would give his students a nickname according to the missing element in their game. He gave one of his slowest students the nickname "Rocket" and the man went on to stardom. Perhaps Jesus was giving Simon the nickname "Rock" because Peter was somewhat wishy-washy.

Then again, maybe Jesus was superseding their family names to establish His own Lordship in their life. He was Lord both of their purpose and their identity.

Whereas Peter's new name may have affirmed a missing aspect of Simon's character, it seems that the name "sons of thunder" was an indication of something that already existed. James and John had strong personalities as evidenced by the following example:

And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" But Jesus turned and rebuked them, and they went to another village (Luke 9:51-56).

The sons of thunder wanted to "nuke" those who stood in Jesus' path. Perhaps Jesus reminded them that their tendency to "thunder" was going to be a problem as they proclaimed the gospel of love!

What would Jesus nickname you? I think mine would be "Gracious," as a reminder that this is what is most missing in my walk with Jesus and His people.

v. 17 – Jesus had a variety of men on his team, even among those twelve apostles. One of them was a zealot, men who refused to submit to Roman rule. They eventually resorted to assassinations of Roman officials and led a revolt decades later against Rome that led to the destruction of Jerusalem. Furthermore, we know that some of the others on Jesus' team were businessmen and one was even a tax collector (Matthew).

vs. 18&19 – It is easy to forget that Jesus chose Judas knowing full well that Judas would eventually betray Him! Jesus was so committed to doing the Father's will that He introduced a traitor into His midst and loved that traitor like the others. Jesus was an amazing man and, of course, a wonderful God. By comparison, I have trouble treating people well based on their past or present behavior toward me. Jesus treated Judas well knowing the future! **God extends grace to you knowing not only your past sins but your future ones as well! If God can do that for you, should you and I do that for others?**

I can accept you and others into my life, knowing that it's probably a matter of time before I disappoint you and you, me. Yet that should not affect my decision to serve and love you. I have tried to stop putting my expectations in others, rather putting them in God, where relationships are concerned. I think this is what Jesus did:

But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man (John 2:24-25).

While Jesus did not entrust Himself to men, He certainly loved and even gave His life for them. Can I do any less? Can you?

Day Three

20 Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. 21 When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind." 22 And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, "He is possessed by Beelzebub! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons."

v. 20 – I wonder what house this was. Peter's? One that Jesus used or lived in? At any rate, the disciples were with Him and the crowd was so dense and their needs so great that Jesus' team could not even take a meal. I've been that busy at times, have you? I am learning to relax in those hectic times and not get so frazzled. As I write, I am in a busy stretch of days that has me in four cities in seven days before I fly to Africa. These are times when my eating and sleeping schedules are disrupted and jet lag tries to limit my effectiveness.

I have made a decision that jet lag is a state of mind; I refuse to give in to its affects. I am also learning not to limit what I can do because I don't think I have enough time. That doesn't mean I don't stop to rest or take refreshment breaks—I do.

By the way, we see here that Jesus was truly a man, for he needed to eat. When Jesus didn't eat, He was hungry. When He worked long and hard, He was tired. So we can't think, "I can't do things like Jesus because He was (and is) God." Jesus left us a ministry model to follow as a man doing God's will. We can do what He did because He went to the Father and sent us the Holy Spirit, who empowers us just as He did Jesus. **Where are**

you limiting yourself? What more can you do, using Jesus as your model and the Holy Spirit as your source of strength?

v. 21 – Jesus’ family thought He was out of His mind! I can remember when I first met the Lord; my family thought I was crazy, too! One day I was in my backyard, crying out the Lord and He brought me to this verse. I thought, “If Jesus’ family thought He was crazy, what’s going to make my family think any differently about me now that I am following Him?” It set me free from trying to please my family as I tried to do the will of God. **Are you free from your family as you serve Him? If not, in what area do you need to be free?**

v. 22 – If it wasn’t already bad enough that His family thought He was crazy, the religious leaders accused Him of being in league with the devil! We cannot overlook the fact that Jesus was a controversial man. His peers thought Him demonic and His family considered Him mad. God is so “normal” and our sinful state so “subnormal” that when God restores godliness, which is the true normal, the true normal looks abnormal or crazy. **Does that make sense?** My other thought here is that a small criticism of me can set me off into a week of depression or anger. Jesus faced much more than I will ever face, yet He maintained His ministry composure and focus. *Help me, Lord. I want to be like Jesus!*

Day Four

23 So Jesus called them and spoke to them in parables: "How can Satan drive out Satan?
24 If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25 If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. 26 And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come.

v. 23 – I have made this point previously, but it bears repeating. Jesus did not take insults personally, but rather turned them into teachable moments. The religious leaders, who should have known better, had just accused Him of having a demon and Jesus basically said, “Let’s talk about that. There is something I want to teach you about the inconsistency of what you just said.” Jesus didn’t storm out of their presence, nor did He respond in anger. *Help me, Lord. I want to be like Jesus.* He had others’ best interests at heart even when they meant Him evil.

Did you ever notice how often Jesus asked questions? There is a book out entitled, *What Would Jesus Eat?* There was a movement that asked, “What would Jesus do?” One day I want to write a book entitled *What Would Jesus Ask?* My skill at asking good questions will determine how good of a teacher I am. **Do you ask good questions to get people thinking? If not, you probably need to learn to do so. Asking good questions requires that you are a good listener. Are you a good listener? You can tell by how many questions you ask others.**

vs. 24&25 – The American president, Abraham Lincoln, made this phrase famous in a speech, but Jesus had introduced the principle centuries earlier: A house divided against

itself cannot stand. Using logic, Jesus set out to prove that He could not be in league with the devil and then do things to hurt the devil's cause on earth. That would be irrational and counterproductive.

It occurs to me that this advice is true even in the Church. If the body of Christ is divided against itself, it cannot stand. In many ways that is just what has happened. We are divided against ourselves. I am not talking about the many denominations that exist. I actually think that is a strength and indicative of the tremendous freedom of interpretation and expression that is available within the bounds of Christianity. When each denomination, however, believes it has *all* the truth or the only group with the truth, it all too often opposes other believers and groups, thus dividing the Lord's house against itself.

I determined many years ago not to participate in Christian bashing. While I am critical of some leadership tendencies I see, I try to support any and all who call on the name of the Lord, whether I understand their theology or not. If they declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, I feel I must stand with them or else contribute to the ineffectiveness of God's house.

v. 26 – It was true that Satan's end had come in the purpose and presence of Jesus, but that wasn't because Jesus had Satan's as He did the good that the people saw. It was not rational to conclude that Jesus was an agent of Satan, for His very acts were undoing the work of Satan.

It is of note that Jesus did not refute His family publicly, but He did respond to the religious leaders publicly. That is probably because the leaders were making their accusations publicly. It's always good to respond to your critics at the same level they issue their criticism. Once I had a private issue with a pastor who then made his responses to me from his pulpit. That's not appropriate. **Do you agree?**

Day Five

27 In fact, no one can enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he can rob his house. 28 I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. 29 But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin." 30 He said this because they were saying, "He has an evil spirit."

v. 27 – Jesus took His teaching one step further, indicating not only that He was not in league with the devil, but that His power to undo Satan's work indicated that He (Jesus) was superior to Satan. Jesus' works were an indication that His mission and power were from God. Jesus could not enter the strong man's house (Satan's house) unless He Himself was stronger.

I admire Jesus' ability to reason clearly and state His case effectively, especially to a hostile audience. *Help me, Lord. I want to be like Jesus!*

v. 28 – Jesus declared, “I tell you the truth.” What else could Jesus do? He could not lie. Yet His perspective was so different from the standard of the day, that what He said often sounded crazy. So Jesus had to assure people over and over again that what He said was true. The lies of Satan were so prevalent that they were accepted as truth, so that Jesus truth sounded like lies. **Does that make sense?**

I am glad that Jesus spoke the truth that all my sins and blasphemies can be forgiven. Thank you, Lord. I need that so desperately! This is the second reference that Mark made to Jesus’ ability and authority to forgive sins. The first was when He healed the paralytic lowered through the roof. Jesus didn’t come just to do good things. He came to deal with the root of man’s problems, which was (and is) sin. That is a good lesson for us to follow: We should deal with root causes wherever and whenever possible. Don’t settle for treating symptoms; treat the source of the symptoms, especially in your own life.

vs. 29&30 – It seems that there is one sin that cannot be forgiven and that is when someone attributes the things and acts of God to be the things and acts of Satan. I have had people come to me and say, “I think I committed the unpardonable sin.” I always respond, “No you didn’t. The very fact that you are here accusing yourself of that is proof that you did not!” Someone who obstinately and continually attributes the work of Christ as the work of Satan is so spiritually dead that they could not even acknowledge the possibility that they have sinned against God.

I think the lesson here for you and me is that we must be careful not to say too quickly, “That’s not God” or “God would never do that.” To say, “God would never do that” is to know all that God would do. You and I are not in a position to know that. So be careful when you judge something to be or not to be of God. Yet if you believe that Jesus Christ is Lord and then honestly conclude that something you see or hear isn’t of God, it doesn’t mean that you have blasphemed or committed an unforgivable sin. Just be open to the fact that you may be wrong and have to change your mind and confession later.

Day Six

31 Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. 32 A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you." 33 "Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked. 34 Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! 35 Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."

vs. 31&32 – Remember that Jesus’ family had come to take Him away because they thought He was sick in the head. The crowd was so big, however, that they could not make their way through. Therefore a message was sent to Him that they were outside waiting to see Him.

v. 33 – Jesus asked another question to help the people understand who He was and what He was sent to do. Jesus was not sent to continue His family’s traditions or name. He was sent to establish a spiritual family that went beyond ethnicity, name or family tree. Jesus served notice that He would not be limited to the family He loved. His focus was on the will of God, as indicated by the story from His youth when He was separated from his family:

"Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he was saying to them (Luke 2:49-50).

Are you free from your family’s expectations and influence as you carry out God’s will for your life?

v. 34 – Jesus raised the issue of family over and over again, because on the one hand, family can promote and support the will of God in your life. On the other hand, family also has the power and influence to oppose the will of God in your life.

"Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me (Matthew 10:37-39).

"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother , his wife and children, his brothers and sisters — yes, even his own life — he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26).

Jesus will not share the loyalty and commitment due Him with anyone else, not even with your family. Again **I ask, are you free from your family’s ties where the will of God is concerned? Where may you be limited because of your family’s expectations for you?**

Day Seven

4:1 Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water's edge. 2 He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said: 3 "Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. 4 As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. 5 Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. 6 But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. 8 Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times."

vs. 1&2 – Jesus did a lot of teaching and was known by the name “Teacher.” The church has continued His teaching emphasis through sermons, homilies, seminaries, Bible schools, local church training schools, and special classes. This is a good thing. Our

teaching techniques, however, often aren't up to Jesus' standards and that's a bad thing. **Have you ever sat through a boring, lifeless presentation in any of the settings I mentioned?** Then you know how it feels to be bored out of your mind in a church setting.

Why do we tolerate bad teaching (and teachers) when we have the model of Jesus, the best teacher of all time? Why do we think that people should just "suck it up" and sit under a poor teacher? Is it because we want to be polite? Not offend anyone? If someone has a bad delivery or no content, why don't we have the courage to say something? Why as teachers don't we seek feedback? Why don't we seek to improve our style and technique, not to manipulate the crowds, but to teach the crowds?

At the same time, why do we accept technique as a substitute for or an indication of content? If a teacher gets excited and "preaches," has he or she necessarily taught a lesson or made a point?

Someone once told me that I am a Wednesday preacher. When I asked him to explain, he said, "I still remember on Wednesday what you said on Sunday." That was a huge compliment. I had two women see me in a public place a few months ago and both told me they were just thinking about two separate messages I had delivered. To the best of my recollection, they heard me eight years ago! That being the case, they *still* remembered and the Word still working in them.

James wrote something that all teachers and preachers need to remember:

Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check (James 3:1-2).

When I teach, my goal is not to entertain, yet entertainment or holding someone's attention is part of teaching. *Help me, Lord. I want to be a teacher like Jesus!*

vs. 3-8 – Jesus taught in parables, which were stories that taught a lesson or principle. I need to be a better story teller if I am to be a better teacher. I can't only rely on the content in my messages; I must know how to deliver the content in the message. That is what Jesus did and what the Holy Spirit will help us do.

As we finish this week's study, I urge you to read the parable of the sower today. We will pick up the story in the next lesson to go through it verse by verse, just as Jesus did..