

Righto;

We're only 3 chapters into the Gospel of Mark, and already, it's becoming pretty clear, that Jesus is causing a major division. Essentially, it's a divide between "those who are on the inside" and "those who are on the outside". And that's the way it always is with Jesus – He forces us to a decision – we cannot remain neutral – "Am I a disciple of Jesus?" or "Do I reject Jesus?"

And it might **seem** (at times) like there's also a third group – the crowds of people who are drawn to Jesus, ,,,, but essentially they're outsiders too, and that'll become very clear (towards the end of the Gospel) when Pilate will ask the crowd, what do you want me to do with Jesus, and the crowd (who were drawn to Jesus), shout out "Crucify Him"

Until those who are being drawn to Jesus, become disciples of Jesus, they're still on the outside ... But, let's begin with that group.

Last week, the religious leaders squabbled with Jesus over the Sabbath, and (of course) they came off 2nd-best. I mean, who was ever going to win a theological argument with the Son of God?

And so they came off 2nd-best, and they headed off (with their tail between their legs) to gather some allies, against Jesus... And so we ended last week, with the religious hierarchy and the political power-brokers, united, against Jesus... And **already** (in Chapter 3) they're beginning to plot His demise...

But despite all this, and despite their very public disapproval of Jesus, Jesus continued to be overwhelmingly popular. He **withdrew with His disciples, to the sea, and a great crowd followed Him...** And these people – they came from miles around... You can see on the map there – they came from miles away...

What was drawing them? Well, they came for the healing – physical healing from diseases – Spiritual healing by the exorcising demons...

It's amazing how far people will travel for healing... *Even today, if someone's suffering a disease that locally can't be cured, if they hear of another treatment somewhere, that just could give them a bit of hope – people will travel across the globe for that...* And it was no different in Jesus' day...

Anyway, there were so many people there, Jesus was in danger of being crushed, as they clamoured to touch Him, or to have their turn at being healed...

He was very popular... And as we continue in this Gospel of Mark, we're going to very quickly see, that Jesus **was** very 'popular'... At least, when He was healing them, and giving them what they wanted, He was very popular... but not always so popular when He was teaching...

And here's this crowd – there's no mention (at this point) that they've come in repentance; there's no mention (at this point) that they've come to hear His teaching – they came because of what He was doing – because of the healing.

And at this stage, it seems like the only ones who grasped, who Jesus truly is, were the demons. We're told: **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.

Here's the thing: Jesus wanted **disciples** who would make Him known – He didn't want the testimony of demons – He wanted **disciples** who would make Him known... And that's what The Lord still wants today – disciples, who will make Him known...

I wonder: Is that who we are? Are we disciples of Jesus, who will make Him known to the world???

But most of the crowds, were not disciples... Jesus had attracted a lot of tyre-kickers and a lot of spectators, but He didn't have a lot of use for them... Jesus came to call Disciples...

So, out of all of that vast, pressing crowd, how did Jesus choose His disciples???

- Did He select those who were from the best families, and prominent people within the community – those of good breeding?... No, not at all.
- Did He go for those who were most popular? Did He pick famous people, or those who had the ability to communicate with charisma?... No, He didn't do that

either.

- Well, did He base it on merit? Did He say, “Look, I’ve got 12 positions vacant; put your resume in; answer these key selection criteria; I’ll assess your application, and pick the 12 who are most qualified.”?... No...
- Well, did He hold a talent quest? or maybe an episode of “Survivor – Galilee”; or maybe He got the Middle East version of Eddie McGuire to do an episode of “Who wants to be a disciple”....

How did Jesus choose His disciples???? Well, He did it the same way He chooses Disciples today...

Jesus called to Him those whom He desired, and they came to Him.

You know, some people get all caught up in arguments over pre-destination vs free will. Does God choose who He’s going to save? Or do we actually have a bit of free will, and we can decide for ourselves, if we’re going to follow Jesus???

And I don’t know why people have such a problem with this, because the answer is “Both”. God chooses – God calls, those whom He desires... And then we enact our free will, to either answer that call, or reject that call.

In the sovereignty of God (Because God is King – because Jesus is King of Kings and Lord of Lords), He has **every right**, to call whomever He chooses... And because when

God created us, He gave us free will, we can either obediently follow that call, or reject that call...

And so this is how it goes: Jesus called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him.

V¹⁴ And He appointed twelve (whom He also named apostles) so that they might be with Him and He might send them out to preach ¹⁵ and have authority to cast out demons.

Alright, Jesus called “disciples” (disciples are followers of Jesus). And Jesus had more than 12 disciples. I know at one stage, He sent out 72 of His followers, all at once, on mission. But of the disciples of Jesus, He named 12 apostles.

These 12, were going to be the ‘inner-circle’, of those who were on the inside.

- These are the ones, that He would send out to preach
- These are the ones, to whom He would give authority, to drive out demons...

But what preparation would they need before they were ready to be sent out? (by the way, the word “Apostle” means “One who is sent as an envoy”) ... Alright, so these were the ones who were going to be sent out to preach the Good News, but what preparation would they need before they were ready to be sent??? ... Their preparation, was simply, to have time with Jesus...

V14, has some of the most wonderful words of blessing: **He appointed twelve.... so that they might be with Him...**

You know, over the years, I've read that phrase many times, but I've never stopped to just marvel at the blessing that those words are... And we have that same blessing today – Jesus calls us to be His disciples, so that we might be with Him.

You know, many people want to know, “What’s in it for me? Why would I want to become a Christian?” And when some people preach the Gospel, they make up all sorts of reasons:

- Come to Jesus, and He'll heal your marriage;
- Come to Jesus, and you'll find meaning in your life;
- He'll take away your addictions;
- He'll heal your disease;
- He'll fix your relationship with your kids;
- Come to Jesus, and He'll help you to do better in your job;
- He'll give you success;
- He'll bless your finances....

There's all sorts of stuff that people preach... Some of it's true; Some of it's sorta true; Some of it's sometimes true; and some of it's a lie...

Do you know what I reckon is the best blessing about becoming a Christian??? Jesus calls us to be His disciples, so that we can be with Him... There's the blessing, right there.

And I thank God, that Jesus returned to the Father, so that We could **all** be with Him...

If Jesus was going to be with those 12 apostles, and give them the time that the relationship needed (for them to grow and to

mature), there was times that Jesus would have to leave the others, to just be with the 12... Imagine if Jesus could only disciple 12 people at a time today– Where would that leave us?

Thankfully, that's not the case any more... If Jesus was still physically walking this earth today, I'm pretty sure that I wouldn't get a look-in... But because Jesus returned to the Father, and sent His Holy Spirit, Jesus can be with you and I, every minute of every day... And what a blessing it is to be with Jesus... Is that enough for you? – To be with Jesus..

And get this, one day, we're going to see Him face-to-face. We'll be with Him, in His presence, for eternity... Now, if that doesn't excite you, what are you doing here????

I talked to a lady once – She professed to being a Christian (and she attended church) – Her Husband did not... And she openly said to me one day, if my husband's not going to be to heaven, I don't want to be there without him. She was telling me, she would rather be with her husband in Hell, than in heaven without him...

And straight away, I knew those were the words of a woman who doesn't know Jesus... She would prefer to be in the presence of her husband, than in the presence of Jesus... And that told me, she didn't know Jesus at all...

Some people tell me, “I find it hard to make myself read the Bible.” “I find it hard to make myself spend time in prayer.”... And I understand that. There's times when I've

felt dry in my Spirit, and I haven't spent much time praying, and I haven't spent much time reading the Bible... But you know what? When I remember the blessing that it truly is, to be with Jesus, and actually begin to focus on the presence of Christ, my spirit isn't dry any more, and I experience again, the blessing of the presence of Jesus...

And if **your** devotional time is dry; if **your** prayers are dry, why don't you focus on the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, and simply enjoy "Being with Him"...

Righto:

There is no better training, for those who would minister for Jesus, than for them to be with Him...:

- You can go to bible college;
- do all sorts of short courses; and
- studies; and
- you could even memorise the Bible (from cover to cover)...

But none of that substitutes for an intimate relationship with Jesus...

If I was to study and prepare a message for today, but didn't spend any time with Jesus, what would I have to offer???

Nothing... At least, nothing of value...

And the Lord may be raising some of you up, to be preachers and teachers... He may be raising you up to lead a youth bible study, or to lead worship, or to do some other ministry... How would we (the church) recognise that God is preparing

you for His service???

You know, one of the first things I look for, is a ‘closeness’ to Jesus. He calls us, that we might be with Him, and that’s where He prepares us – while we are close to Jesus, that’s where He does His greatest work...

So, Jesus called ‘the 12’, to be His apostles... What sort of people, does Jesus call, to His mission? “There must be a ‘sort’, isn’t there?” **There must be**, because I’ve heard so many people say:

- “I’m **not** the sort”;
- “Jesus would never call someone like me to ministry.
- I’m the **wrong** sort of person.
- He should call someone else.”

But here’s the thing, Jesus calls those who will be near to Him. And as we read this list of Apostles, it’s a bit hard to work out who’s who in the list of the 12, because Jesus had a habit of changing people’s names, and giving them nick-names.

- He called the working class, like fishermen
- He called people of dubious occupation, like a tax collector
- And yet He called those in whom no deceit could be found (Like Nathanael, who’s probably identified here as Bartholomew [BTW])
- He called a zealot. (What’s a zealot?) Well, today, depending on whether a zealot is on your side or whether he’s your enemy, you’d either call him “a freedom

fighter” or “a terrorist”. A zealot, is a militant radical.

- Jesus called those who were at times, a bit blunt. He named James and John, “Boanerges” which means “sons of thunder”. They’re the sort of people who when a town didn’t welcome them asked Jesus, “Shall we call fire down from Heaven to consume them?”... No....
- He called brothers;
- And of course, He also called someone who would betray Him.

Does Jesus have a “type” of disciple that He calls??? Yes He does. He calls people just like you; and you; and you; and you... ; and me;;; He calls all types.

Righto:

Those who respond, when Jesus calls, move to the inside...

But you know, sometimes the most surprising thing about Christianity, is the sort of person who stays on the outside. In today’s reading, we get 2 little glimpses of Jesus' family, trying to ‘reign Him in’... They tried to restrain Him “He’s out of His mind”...

I wonder – Were they concerned that Jesus was making a spectacle of Himself, and “What would people think of their family? I don’t know...

I sorta suspect, they could see the writing on the wall: As Jesus was becoming more and more popular with the plebs, and more and more hated by the powerful, the future didn't look good for Jesus... And maybe that's why His family tried to take control of the situation – because they could see the trouble He was headed for...

And you know, even today, when someone gets serious in their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, often it's their families who tell them "You're taking this religion thing too far."... "Yeah, it's good to have a bit of religion, but don't go getting too serious about it – you're crazy..."

And so, at this stage, Jesus' family were on the outside. But I thank God, that later on, at least some of them became dedicated disciples. Definitely His mother (Mary); and His brother (James); ... Maybe others...

But at this stage, they tried to hinder His mission. They were well and truly on the outside...

....

Some people worship family more than they worship God... They convince themselves that they're serving God, by giving their first, and their best, to their family. And sometimes, that can be sorta true... But there comes a time, when family draws us away from God's purpose, and when that happens, our family's become an idol...

I reckon, I could very bluntly say, that within the church, “idolatry of family” is often seen as a virtue, when it is actually a flaw... And here’s a little test to see where we stand in that:

Hear these words of Jesus, and you tell me, “Are you encouraged by these words? Or are you offended by these words?”

³¹ And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him.

³² And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you.” ³³ And he answered them, “**Who are my**

mother and my brothers?” ³⁴ And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, “**Here are my mother and my brothers!** ³⁵ **For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.”**

Are you encouraged by those words? Or are you offended for His mum and His brothers???

Here’s the thing:

The radical call of Jesus to discipleship, is to throw off every restraint, to be in the will of God, and to do the will of God...

- And sometimes, it might be **good** things, that are restraining us;
- It might be people we **love**, who are holding us back from fully committing to Christ;

- It might even be our families, who try to restrain us from getting too serious about this Jesus thing...

And the radical call of Jesus, is to throw off every restraint, to be in, and to do, the will of God...

whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.

This week, we've concentrated on the disciples of Jesus – those who are on the inside, **and** on the crowds of people who are being drawn to Jesus... Next week, we're going to see what's spiritually going on with those who reject Jesus, and hate Jesus... ,

But for today, I want to leave us with this question:
“What’s holding us back?”

Where are you? Are you one of the crowd on the outside, looking in? Or have you come to be, in the presence of Jesus?

Do you feel and know, the utter blessing, of being with Jesus??? And is that enough???

Song