

CLOSE-UPS OF JESUS THROUGH THE LENS OF MARK - Part five

Wednesday, July 22nd, 2020 - 7:00 p.m.

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DISCIPLESHIP IN A CONFLICTING CULTURE

- 1) **Mark 3:7-19 - *Large crowds and a small following*** - "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.[13] And he went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him. [14] 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. [16] He appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); [17] James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder); [18] Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Cananaean, [19] and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him."

There are some interesting contrasts in these verses. The crowd follows Jesus to find relief from their suffering. Jesus has great compassion and touches even those whose approach to Him is driven on purely selfish motives. Yet in His heart, Jesus knows that while they long for His touch, they have no idea about the kingdom He is coming to establish, nor the ***cost of entering it***. Jesus shows such undeserved favour and compassion here.

In contrast, the ***demons*** know exactly who Jesus is (12) but have no intention of submitting to His Lordship. Their acclaim will only hurt His cause and Jesus quickly silences them. ***Acclaim without discipleship is detestable in Christ's eyes.***

Jesus saw His best means for change in a ***small committed band of followers***. A small school of true learners was the only antidote to the fickleness of the masses. A small group could be disciplined, tracked and disciplined. The uncommitted would never last in such an environment.

This has much to say to the church of today. We tend to think of success in terms of numbers. Crowds

are not bad. Crowds may be good for motivation and and inspiration (remember the early church grew into the thousands very quickly) but the real work of the kingdom is always done in a smaller setting (prayer groups, Bible study, outreach teams, etc.). The sad point here is that most of our people never move beyond the Sunday crowd stage, and growth is almost impossible to achieve at this level alone.

- 2) **Mark 3:16-19 - *Very ordinary men* - “He appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); [17] James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder); [18] Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Cananaean, [19] and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.”**

In fact, there were some clear failures. Why did Jesus choose such people? See **1 Corinthians 1:26-31** - **“For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. [27] But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; [28] God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, [29] so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. [30] He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption. [31] Therefore, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”**

God will go to any length to wean us from pride and self-reliance. Perhaps the greatest lesson from the Master is this - the real work of Christ's Kingdom will always be done with ***two distinctive marks***:

- a) It will always be done primarily in common, unobtrusive ways. Then and now Christ’s deepest work doesn’t ***market*** well. The mass media will never usher in the age of spiritual renewal. It may ***touch*** many, but it will ***transform*** very few.
- b) The real agents for change in Christ's kingdom will not be the superstars or pastors. The average person, recruited and seriously committed to using his daily activities to follow Jesus, will make the difference in this world. This ragged band of followers outlasted the Roman Empire. ***Never underestimate your daily witness to Christ.*** Yours is the one that counts the most.

- 3) **Mark 3:20-30 - *The sources of opposition* - “Then he went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. [21] And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for**

they were saying, "He is out of his mind." [22] And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "by the prince of demons he casts out the demons." [23] And he called them to him and said to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? [24] If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. [25] And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. [26] And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end. [27] But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house. [28] "Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, [29] but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin"— [30] for they had said, "He has an unclean spirit."

First, *from His own friends and family (20-21)*. The family saw the crowds snowballing around Jesus. It was a scary experience for them. They were used to a milder form of religion - something calmer, safer, more bland. Things seemed to be getting out of control. Jesus predicted many of His followers would experience the very same opposition from their own loved ones.

Second, *from His enemies (22-27)*. They had been forced by Jesus to come to a choice about who He was. The evidence was no longer something quiet or deniable. They began to feel cornered. It's interesting that under such pressure the sinful bias of their hearts came to the surface. Better to attribute His work to Satan himself than bow the knee to Jesus as the Son of God. This is what prepares us for Jesus' words on the *unpardonable sin* in verse 28. Its nature is exposed in these people.

Unbelief is not an intellectual problem as much as a spiritual and moral one. The atheist can't find God for the same reason the criminal can't find a police officer. Unbelief hardens the heart against God and puts repentance out of reach. While Jesus doesn't specifically say they have reached this point, He does warn of its possibility. Many religious people need to think seriously about these words today. And to those who are genuinely fearful they have committed this unpardonable sin, your deeply felt concern is the strongest evidence you haven't.

- 4) **Mark 3:28 - *The vastness of God's mercy* - "Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter...."**

Sometimes people get so concerned about the unforgivable sin that they miss the beautiful promise in the first part of this verse. There is *promise* as well as *warning*. You need never doubt God's mercy or

willingness to cleanse your heart. All sins and blasphemies will be forgiven - lying, adultery, homosexuality, child abuse, drug addiction, satanism, etc. Never let the devil sow fear and doubt in your heart.

- 5) **Mark 3:31-35 - *Enjoying the love of God* - "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] Whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother."**

Jesus describes His love for His followers in very strong terms. How much do you love your mother? How much do you think Jesus loved His? Jesus is strongly attached to all who seriously follow Him. They are truly members of His family.