



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

A Widening Ministry

Mark 3.7-19

David Anguish

What Are We Doing?

We continue our studies from Mark, written to declare “the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mark 1.1 ESV). Study of the gospels is always a joy and a challenge at multiple levels. Jesus presents depths we can never fully explore. There are also some passages that leave us wondering what we can learn and say from them. Our text at first seems to be one of those.

As I studied this text and began to identify its common thread, I was reminded of a lectureship class presentation I heard in which Dr. Carlus Gupton spoke about “Breathing New Life Into Established Churches.”¹ He shared a 16-page handout of ideas and resources for further study. From it, he highlighted only three or four ideas—and spoke for an hour.

He noted that while many established churches “are in-grown and stagnant, many [others] are vibrant mission outposts.” He offered research based pointers for leaving behind an atmosphere of lukewarmness and complacency and instead continuing to thrive and make a difference.

From three statements of philosophy and eight guiding perspectives he recommended, I’ll emphasize three.

1. A church wanting to be vibrant must understand that it will take a sustained commitment to hard work in identifying and pursuing a specific mission.
2. The mission must be focused and clearly stated.
3. It must be kept at the forefront as all decisions are made and activities planned.

To do that, it is necessary to “consult good resources for benchmarks on church effectiveness” (Gupton). I submit that the most important benchmark is the example of Jesus. Our text shows what he was about and what his followers should be about. These are lessons to learn as we ponder a widening ministry² designed to fulfill our mission.

The Place and Purpose of 3.7-12 in Mark’s Account

The first paragraph is one of Mark’s summaries of Jesus’ Galilean ministry (cf. 1.39; 4.33-34; 6.6, 56). It “functions as a transition from the preceding collection of conflict stories (2:1-3:6) to a new

section that may be thought of as extending to 6:6 (where Jesus is rejected in Nazareth) or even to 8:30 (the confession at Caesarea Philippi)" (Hurtado, 56).

As the section (3.7-6.6) develops, we see Jesus teaching in parables (4.1-34), working miracles in both Gentile and Jewish settings (5.1-43), and being rejected by his hometown (6.1-6). From these incidents, we see more of what Jesus was about and the effect of his ministry on the people around him.

In the summary in 3.7-12, crowds come from Galilee in the north, Judea in the south, Idumea, where the former Edomites had been forcibly converted to Judaism during the time just prior to the New Testament, the region east of the Jordan River where there were mostly Jews, and Tyre and Sidon, cities to the northwest that were mainly Gentile cities (Hurtado, 60-61).

Try to imagine the scene which "would have been one of frantic commotion" (Hurtado, 56). The people saw Jesus as a holy man with healing powers. Desperate for relief and healing, hoping that a mere touch by Jesus would cure them (cf. 5.25-34), they took great pains to reach him. The situation was potentially dangerous, so "he told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, lest they crush him" (3.9). The boat was not for escape, but to manage the situation. Jesus' practice was to heal the sick, whether of body (v. 10) or spirit (v. 11).

Beginning to Understand What Jesus Was About

Mark's summary in 3.7-12 serves as a primer on Jesus and his mission.

1. The service of Jesus was attractive to those who had the need for healing. They sought him because he had intentionally gone throughout Galilee to heal the sick (see 1.38-41). He was compassionate and showed his concern. But his compassion was not the kind that could be manipulated. He knew who he was, and what he was about. Some accepted that completely. Some rejected it. Some sought to take advantage of it for their own ends. Regardless of what others did, Jesus remained on course in declaring and practicing the principles of God's reign.
2. Jesus healed the whole person. He had a Jewish view of people and of sin. Sin had affected more than the safety of the human soul. The Jews associated sickness with sin and evil (notice how the word *σῶζω*, *sōzō*, is used of both saving and healing; e.g., Mark 3.4; 5.23, 28-29; 8.35). Jesus offered restoration and deliverance.
3. Although Mark does not say it explicitly in this summary, he indirectly reminds us that the heart of Jesus' mission was proclamation (cf. 1.21-34). The demons used the phrase in Mark's title, "the Son of God" (see 5.7). Apart from them, in Mark only God (1.11; 9.7) and the centurion at the cross (15.39) do the same. But whenever the phrase is used, it reminds us that Jesus' mission included proclamation, not just doing good deeds.

So, we begin to understand what Jesus was about. That is important for us because we are called to make his mission ours by doing what the two sets of brothers and Levi were called to do—follow Jesus (1.16-20; 2.13-17). But are we drawing the correct conclusion from Jesus' example? The next paragraph confirms that we are.

Understanding What We Are To Be About (3.13-19)

Leaving the crowds, Jesus ascended “the mountain and called to him those he desired, and they came to him” (v. 13). The twelve selected, the same as the number of the tribes in ancient Israel, were especially commissioned for service and leadership. The name Jesus gave them, “apostles,” i.e., “sent out with a commission” (Hurtado, 62), served as a constant reminder of that commission. The rest of the New Testament shows that they were a core group, directly trained by Jesus, modeling what being his follower means, and commissioning others to follow their example (cf. Mt. 28.18-20, esp. 20; 2 Tim. 2.2).

What were they to do? Mark tells us three things.

1. “So that they might be with him” (v. 14). Here is discipleship at its most basic, not perfection, but being “with Jesus.” We focus on him (Heb 12.2), learn him (Eph. 4.20), imitate him (1 Cor 11.1; Phil 2.5-11), and gaze at him to see more of his glory, a practice that opens us up to “being transformed into the same image” (2 Cor 3.17-18). We therefore learn to show his holiness, compassion, and concern to help people find healing, restoration, and deliverance.
2. “... and he might send them out to preach” (v. 14). We should never minimize the importance of proclamation for completing the mission we have been given. While a balance is needed, and some have stressed preaching to the exclusion of compassion, healing, etc., the right correction of that extreme is not to swing to the other extreme that ignores proclamation. It is the proclamation that informs our service, explains the reason for it, and points people to the ultimate goals of transformation and spiritual rescue that Jesus intends (cf. Rom 8.29; 2 Cor 3.17-18; Heb 12.10; 1 Pet 1.13). Unless we are committed to preaching, we are not truly practicing his mission.
3. “... and have authority to cast out demons” (v. 15). Mark’s account reveals a particular interest in Jesus’ authority (cf. 1.22, 27; 2.10; 11.28-33), and often connects it with his exorcisms (even when Mark does not use the word; see 1.23-26, 34; 3.11). Two things stand out about this. (1) Jesus was so against evil that he worked to defeat it. (2) He embodied and called all people to “the way, and the truth, the life” (John 14.6). Our mission should do the same, not because we possess the same authority he did, but because he has authorized us as his followers to speak and act in his name (Acts 4.10-12).

Acts shows that the apostles did these things as they carried on his mission. They preached (Acts 2.22-36), met the needs of frail humans (cf. Acts 5.12-16), healed in his name (3.6), and dared to offer salvation in his name and only in his name (4.10-12). As Peter told Cornelius, they were committed to showing “how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all that he did ...” (10.38-39).

Exhortation

Whatever the specific activities done in service to him—and there are many ways we can serve—our mission must be to do as he did and as he taught his first followers to do. The good news for us is that we can see what that mission is to be from texts like the one we have examined here. Ironically, the times in which we live are also a source of good news, precisely because of

the changes in our culture. We are being almost forced to focus on our mission as perhaps never before in our lifetimes. That is good news because, as Kennon Callahan has put it, “the church is always at its best on the mission field” where “[it] is lean and strong and has courage and vision. . . . God has blessed us by placing us on the mission field.”³

As we proceed, wherever we are and in whatever situation we find ourselves, let us see his mission clearly, commit to it without reservation, and do it diligently. Because it is the mission of Jesus.

www.davidanguish.com

Notes

¹ A version of this material is available online. Carlus Gupton, “Breathing New Life Into Established Churches.” Hope Network: Mentoring Leaders Guiding Churches. For Part 1, see <https://hopenetworkministries.org/2016/03/breathing-new-life-into-established-churches-part-1/> Accessed August 4, 2021.

² The title for this sermon is adapted from the section heading, “The Ministry Widens,” in Larry W. Hurtado, *Mark*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1983, 1989), 56-63.

³ Kennon Callahan, *Effective Church Leadership*, cited by Gupton.