

IN DARK TIMES WE NEED SHEPHERDS

Mark 3:1-19

Key Verse: 13-14 “Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out...”

In chapters 2-3 we see the mounting opposition against Jesus and his ministry and unlike other gospels, we won't hear about the Pharisees again for some time (7:1, 9:14, 10:2, et. al). Mark really emphasizes the early, immediate clash of the gospel teaching with the traditions of the Pharisees culminating in their decision to kill Jesus (3:6). Last week, P. Ron helped us to consider why the gospel was so threatening to their cultural establishment. This week we need to think about the attitude of Jesus' opponents, the effect it had on their society, compared to the life-giving shepherding of Jesus. In our times as well, there are many in need. How will we respond to these unprecedented times? Today we learn from Jesus to care for people and to raise disciples.

First, Jesus teaches us to value people above legalistic rules (1-6).

Verses 1 begins, “Another time Jesus went into the synagogue.” Almost all other translations say “again Jesus entered the synagogue” (ESV). The word “again” draws a direct connection to the last time Jesus entered this synagogue in Capernaum on the Sabbath in chapter 1:21-28. There are 7 Sabbath healings recorded in the Gospels and the 3 that are recorded in Mark's Gospel are all right here in a row from the end of chapter 1 to chapter 3 (1:25-26; 1:31; 3:5). That, as well as the conflicts in chapter 2, helps us see that it was Jesus' rejection of Pharisaic tradition that drew immediate conflict with them.

So, as we come to this chapter they are now on the offensive, it says that “some of them” (referring to the Pharisees and Scribes (Lk 6:7) “were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus” (2). Accuse, in the Greek, is a legal term meaning they were now collecting evidence to build a case against Jesus. We must understand that their tradition began with good intention. Their nation had been completely wiped out,

tens of thousands killed and the rest taken into exile, ten tribes never returned all because they did not keep God's law. Therefore the Pharisees sought to interpret the law in a way that put a hedge around the law so that no one could even get close to breaking it. For example God called for a 24 hour Sabbath but their law called for a 25 hour Sabbath just to be safe. And in many such ways they padded the law by meticulously defining each law down to the minutest possible application. These "laws" were only in oral form taught by the Pharisees in Jesus' day and were eventually written down in the Mishna and Talmud. The problem was that over time they began to teach their oral tradition (traditions of the elders 7:5), more than the actual word of God and as if it were equal to the word of God.

Jesus never broke the Law, not once, nor did he advocate breaking God's law (Mt 5:17,20). "The law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good" (Ro 7:12). The law teaches us what is sin (Ro 3:20,7:7). If Jesus had broken even one law he would be guilty of breaking all the law (Ja 2:10), he would be a sinner and he could not have been the Messiah. What Jesus was against was legalism. Many people misunderstand legalism as strictly following what the Bible says when it goes against culture—that's actually holiness. RC Sproul defined 3 types of legalism: first is to obey law out of the context of a relationship with God, second is to obey the letter of the law devoid from the spirit of it, but the most common and deadly form "adds our own rules to God's law and treats them as divine... Jesus rebuked the Pharisees at this very point, saying, "You teach human traditions as if they were the word of God." We have no right to heap up restrictions on people where He has no stated restriction."¹ We must ask ourselves: are there rules and traditions that we are teaching as if they are in the Bible? Over-interpreting God's laws teaches people to just follow rules and never to examine their heart before God and decide by faith what is lawful—which is actually the intent of the law. For example the "law" they wanted to accuse Jesus of breaking was "healing on the Sabbath." They considered this work, even though the actual commandment only prohibited labor. Such an overreaching law only led to hypocrisy. For example, if your teeth hurt on the Sabbath you were not allowed to take vinegar to heal but if you took it as part of your meal and you were healed, well then you were healed—and there are many, many more examples.²

¹ *How Can I Develop a Christian Conscience?* by R.C. Sproul <https://www.ligonier.org/blog/3-types-legalism/>

² Tractate ("section") Yoma 8.6b, The Mishnah, trans. H. Danby (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 172.

At the center of this power-struggle was not a law but an actual human being with a shriveled hand (1b). The Greek word means "to be dried and shrunken" and Mark uses a unique tense that suggests that it was caused by an injury—it was not congenital. In that agrarian society he wouldn't be able to work after such an injury, so he would become poor, he could not marry, he could not even tie his shoes. Because of his one withered hand his whole life must have withered up. One person I know, shared that when she needed a small skin graft on her hand she felt very embarrassed by it and found many ways to cover it up. How much more this man must have lived in constant shame and embarrassment. Everyone must have pitied his situation but the Pharisees didn't even see him. They only watched Jesus "to see if he would heal on the Sabbath." The irony here, is that they knew that Jesus was so full of compassion that he would definitely heal him but that didn't move their hearts in any way.

Jesus came in and his heart immediately went out to the man. Jesus could have avoided the confrontation by healing him quietly after sunset. But Jesus confronted the controversy head on, "Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, 'Stand up in front of everyone'" (3). Because you know, it's so easy to talk about right and wrong theologically until we see the actual person. As the man stood there, "Jesus asked them, 'Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?'" Their silent answer was "do nothing, that is legal." But by not doing the good they knew they ought to do, they were in fact doing evil. They would rather destroy life than save it over legality. "He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts" (5a). (Or as the ESV puts it "...grieved at their hardness of heart.") "He said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored" (5). You know each of us has been wounded and deformed by sin in some way. If there is no love or mercy of Jesus, we hide our wound out of shame and fear. But Jesus literally laid down his life so that we could stretch out our hand and be healed—that is the gospel.

But as a result they decided to kill Jesus (6). Perhaps in their heart they really believed that they were right and were protecting the pure law of God and justified themselves that God's law taught them to kill false teachers. We saw what happens as a result of this kind of mentality on January 6, as protestors,

rioters and militant groups converged on the capitol to protest the results of the election and some with the plan to incite violence and insurrection. They stormed the Capitol, assaulted police, vandalized offices, erected a gallows on the capital grounds chanting “Hang Mike Pence” and attempted to take lawmakers hostage. Officer Brian Sicknick, age 42 was struck in the head with fire extinguisher and died as he engaged with rioters. It was a disgraceful and heinous act. What greatly saddened me was to see people carrying “Jesus Saves” banners and playing Christian music while participating in a riot, thinking they were doing God’s will. Much of this fire was aroused by New Apostolic Reformation preachers who convinced their followers that the church must be married to President Trump according to false Dominionist belief that Jesus will not come again until the church takes control of the government by force if necessary. These strange churches have made the name ‘Evangelical’ a byword. People these days know Christians more by what they are against than what they are for. They see Christians hate more than they see them love. To be sure we must defend the truth and define sin but we must do it in a way that loves sinners—that is the gospel. Jesus taught us that we are to love even—and maybe especially—our enemies. Do we have legalism in our hearts that makes us value rules above people? May God help us to root out any Pharisaism in our own hearts.

Second, in the time of national distress, Jesus raised shepherds (7-19).

Well things had gotten pretty heated in Capernaum so, “Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the lake, and a large crowd from Galilee followed” (7). We’d expect Jesus to become a social pariah at this point but the common people followed. “When they heard about all he was doing, many people came to him from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, and the regions across the Jordan and around Tyre and Sidon” (8). What is it that people heard? They heard that there was a teacher who forgave sins, who was willing to touch lepers, who didn’t come to condemn sinners but to be their doctor, that his ministry was full of joy like a wedding banquet, that he cared about people above rules, that where he went demons were driven out, the sick became well, lives were restored, people were made whole and the kingdom of God came near! Isaiah says, “He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom” (Isa 40:11 KJV). What a beautiful shepherd our Lord Jesus is. And so people literally, came from the north, south, east and west, from near and far,

from the country, and the city, from the despised Gentile areas, and the Jerusalem elite. And when we show the love and mercy of Jesus they will come like this as well. As we see, this was not a lovely crowd. Many were demon-possessed, those considered cursed because of birth defects, the ill beyond cure, the deformed, the despised—no one wants to care for these hopeless dirty masses of humanity. It seems like a thankless, discouraging ministry, endlessly giving, and giving to meet the needs of so many lost. Helping people is like trying to clean a house in which children live, as soon as you get it clean, you turn around, “Hey I just cleaned this mess!” Helping people is never ending.

One person always shared his desire to have deep fellowship with others, to cry and pray together but I never really understood why. But when he shared the reality of helping people in a messy, hopeless situation my heart was broken. It’s hard. We want to care for people when they look lovely but when we see the dirt and the endless need just beneath the surface, there is a strong urge to run away, to put up a barrier to protect our own life. We measure successful ministry by attendance, programs, and raising committed disciples but we may need a new metric for gauging success in light of this passage. This crowd would come and go. Yet to Jesus, to show the love of God and bring the kingdom of God to earth is worth it.

Yet not all were there to be healed, it says that “those with diseases were pushing forward,” meaning there were those without diseases, those who had come to hear the word of God and follow and learn from Jesus. Jesus cared for ALL their needs both spiritual and physical holistically. Though Jesus healed many they were pressing forward to try to be first, so much so that Jesus had to have a boat ready to retreat into (9-10). It shows that the need was greater than what Jesus could physically do as a man—I think our doctors and nurses these days can really relate to this situation. Mark 6:34 says, “Jesus...had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.” There were so many—too many—Bible experts in the land but there were no shepherds. In our times too, there is so much need. We know the ravaging effects that the pandemic has had on people’s emotional and mental well-being. People are isolated and afraid, some cannot make ends meet. I wasn’t for the reopening of schools but my heart was broken when I read about the drastic increase in child abuse and hunger as a result of the closures. For many home is a place they need to escape from, a place of fear and

neglect—that fear is hell, I know that fear. At the same time, the Greater Chicago Religious Directory of the Church Federation of Greater Chicago once listed over 10,000 individual churches—that would mean there’s roughly a church for every 300 people in Chicago yet there is so much despair. One Tribune Article read, “Drugs, despair in community of ‘1,000 churches.’”³ What do we need in our times? What did Jesus do when he saw the need of his times?

Verses 13-15 say, “Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons.” He raised disciples. When we look at the group that he called in verses 16-19—four blue collar fishermen Peter, Andrew, James and John, Matthew a former public sinner who preyed on his own people for profit, Simon the Zealot a fiery political activist, Judas Iscariot a thief and traitor, and Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, were not notable at all, we know almost nothing about them—we may wonder why he wanted them. Yet, he saw them with great hope, he wanted these guys. What is the quality that Jesus looked for in his disciples? What do we look for when we go out inviting people to Bible study? Those who will say ‘yes’ and actually come! Jesus knew that those who came were the ones God had given him (Jn 17:6). Sometimes we wonder if we will ever become the people that Jesus wants. But we remember that God chose us, and Jesus has a purpose for us and we can depend on that. No matter our doubts, no matter the mistakes we have made, Jesus has a purpose for us. If Jesus had not called disciples, then his ministry would have disappeared quickly upon his death. But it is the disciples who began the church, who wrote the New Testament, and whom Jesus said would do even greater things than him (14:12).

“He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out” (14). According to the book “The Call” by Os Guinness, Jesus gave his disciples both a primary and a secondary calling. Their primary calling was to HIM to be with HIM. The first step of discipleship is learning to love being with Jesus, living like Jesus, spending time in devotion, prayer, Bible study and worship—this is the foundation of a Christian life. This being with him, was not a once or twice a week event as long as they had no other conflicts. They left everything to follow

³ <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-2009-05-17-0905160012-story.html>

Jesus (10:28). It was 24/7 365—for better or for worse, in sickness and in health and even death would not do them part. Their secondary calling was “that he might send them out.” In three years of ministry Jesus only sent his disciples out to preach one time. But they were with him all the time. As we are with Jesus and observe his heart for the lost and see what he is doing in the world and see the need, God will call us to be sent out—it is impossible to truly be with Jesus and not feel this. This calling is separate from our career or talent and is specifically a calling “to preach and to have authority to drive out demons.” And there are many ways to carry this out. Some are called as full-time ministers, some are not, some are called as campus shepherds and some are not, some are called to CBF, HBF, Spanish Service, Community Outreach, Young Professional Ministry, Family Ministry, Education Department, Online Ministry, Eldership and even a few are set apart to be missionaries to other nations (Ac 13:2). All who have children are called to the noble and vitally crucial role of raising them as disciples of Jesus who will carry the gospel into the next generation. But all of us, regardless of where and how we are called, must proclaim the good news, because the need in our times is just too great. Anyone who has studied the Bible and can clearly express the gospel message, who loves Jesus and has a personal testimony of his grace in their life, can share the gospel with someone. And the work that Jesus gives us to do, he gives us the authority to do as well. When we simply preach the gospel, simply teach the Bible as it is, demons are driven out before us, strongholds are torn down and entire nations, and history is changed forever. It has nothing to do with our ability, it is Jesus’ authority given to those who obey him and I have seen it first-hand so many amazing and beautiful times!

Still we may reason that only some are given such a calling, that I am not qualified and God will call someone else to do it. This calling was initially given to the 12 here, who were chosen out of the many disciples following Jesus, but at the end of Mark’s Gospel he says to all believers, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation...” And that even signs “will accompany those who [simply] believe” (16:15,17).

At a meeting of Baptist leaders in the late 1700s, a newly ordained minister stood to argue for the value of overseas missions. He was abruptly interrupted by an older minister who said, "Young man, sit down! You are an enthusiast. When God pleases to convert the heathen, he'll do it without consulting you or me." Well,

that young man, William Carey, did not listen he went as a missionary to India. In December 1800, after seven years of missionary labor, Carey baptized his first convert, Krishna Pal, and two months later, he published his first Bengali New Testament. With this and subsequent editions, Carey and his colleagues laid the foundation for the study of modern Bengali, which up to this time had been an "unsettled dialect."⁴ And this is a common story, Rebecca Pyaohn shared with me that Adoniram Judson's translation of the Bible into Burmese and his writing of their now standard dictionary, led to the proper development of their language. William Carey also worked for social reform in India, including the abolition of infanticide, widow burning (sati), and assisted suicide. The incredible conversion of the Waodani tribe deep in the Ecuadorian rainforest in 1955 was made popular through the movies "Through the Gates of Splendor" and "The End of the Spear." Before meeting Jesus the killing of twins and deformed babies was regular practice. Children and widows were buried with their dead husbands and their tribe was so violent that within another generation it is estimated that warring tribes would have hunted each other into extinction. But the amazing power of forgiveness and love transformed their entire culture. The gospel is not just religious belief but wherever missionaries have gone they have brought life, healing and social reform. Wherever the gospel goes the kingdom of God comes to earth.

What should we do in these unprecedented times in history? Jesus teaches us to raise disciples and send them out. What our world needs now, more than ever is the true gospel. They do not need rules and traditions taught by men, but the love and compassion of shepherds filled with the love of Jesus. May God help us to hear his call and be sent.

⁴ <https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/missionaries/william-carey.html>