

THE SERVANT UNDER PRESSURE

Mark 3:7-19

This last week I went out to eat with some folks from church and we started talking about how much farming has changed over the years. And through the conversation I was reminded of how growing up on a larger wheat farm, dad grew enough wheat that he refused to buy a combine because it was just too much for him to do on his own. It would take too long. Everyone knows that about the time the wheat is ready to harvest, those storms start rolling in just like the other night in Crawford and it's time to get the wheat out. One year, as soon as the harvesters had pulled into town and set up their campers, a storm came and wiped out all the wheat. The harvesters came and left in less than 24 hours. With each rain the wheat loses protein and quality. There's more pressure at harvest time. I think farmers pray more and pray harder. They hire more help. And I think that's a good illustration of where we're going today as we come back to Mark.

We are entering into the busiest moments in Jesus' ministry. His ministry is expanding rapidly. Things are picking up. The spiritual harvest is on and so is the pressure with it. And what I couldn't help but see this morning from this passage is some of the key things that Jesus does as He lives under the pressures of ministry. Mark 3:7-19.

“Jesus withdrew to the sea with His disciples; and a great multitude from Galilee followed; and also from Judea, and from Jerusalem, and from Idumea, and beyond the Jordan, and the vicinity of Tyre and Sidon, a great number of people heard of all that He was doing and came to Him. And He told His disciples that a boat should stand ready for Him because of the crowd, so that they would not crowd Him; for He had healed many, with the result that all those who had afflictions pressed around Him in order to touch Him. Whenever the unclean spirits saw Him, they would fall down before Him and shout, “You are the Son of God!” And He earnestly warned them not to tell who He was.

And He went up on the mountain and summoned those whom He Himself wanted, and they came to Him. And He appointed twelve, so that they would be with Him and He could send them out to preach, and to have authority to cast out the demons. And He appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom He gave the name Peter), and James the son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James (to them He gave the name Boanerges, which means, “Sons of Thunder”); and Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Zealot; and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Him.”

Again, the first thing we notice from the passage today is that Jesus' popularity is growing, and with it the mounting pressures of ministry. We're entering into His busiest moments in ministry. Even though people are still a little unsure what to think about Him, He has become very popular and reached what we could call “celebrity status”.

The demons know exactly who He is – the Son of God – and they voice that out as we've seen. But He could care less about their testimony about Him. He tells them to be quiet and get out of the way. He wants people to make their own conclusions about Him without their testimony having any influence on it.

The Pharisees are certain that He is a false teacher and a threat to their religious establishment. Jesus has been colliding with them several times: 1) They're upset about what He teaches – He teaches the Word of

God and was not teaching their manmade system; 2) He had forgiven the sins of the paralytic and that upset them; 3) He chose Levi (Matthew) the tax collector to be His disciple; 4) He doesn't observe their manmade religious rules, such as the ceremonial fasting twice a week; 5) He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners in His pursuit of them, so He is far too scandalous in His pursuit of sinners; and 6) He broke the Sabbath in their eyes when He let the disciples pick some grain and eat it on the Sabbath. And that's the last one we've seen really sent them over the edge and started plotting with a group called the Herodians to kill Him. And though Jesus is not afraid of the confrontation with these guys, as we have seen, He does withdraw to the sea. It's not His time.

Another reason why He withdraws is because of **the crowds**. He had to be out in the countryside where everyone could gather. People had come from all over – north to south to east to west – the whole territory of Israel and beyond. And the crowds for the most part don't know who He is – they're still deciding, as we'll see next week. But for now, it seems that they just think of Him as a celebrity miracle-working savior who's going to save them from a hard life and make life easier. They aren't the most spiritually minded crowd. They are seeking what He has to offer. And because of this lack of spiritual-mindedness, He's about to preach the Sermon on the Mount where the emphasis is on their spiritual needs. According to the other gospels it may have taken place between verses 19 and 20 of this chapter.

And that was Jesus' priority: preaching and teaching. He actually has to get into a boat just so He can focus on preaching and teaching without being hindered by the crowds hindering or crushing Him (Lk. 5:3)! But I also think there was a strategy behind it so people could hear. You've probably noticed that sound travels really well on water. Someone can out in a boat in the middle of the lake and yet it's amazing how well you can hear them! You should be careful what you say on a boat! Water is nature's megaphone. And the northern shores of Galilee are hills which served as a perfect amphitheater. It was the perfect place to preach to the crowds without being crushed by the crowds.

The Pharisees think He's a fraud and want Him dead. The crowds are following Him and crushing Him but they aren't very interested in spiritual things. The government, through friends of Herod were starting to get wind of a potential, but false insurrection. The ministry pressure is through the roof at this point. **How does Jesus deal with the pressure? How does He respond to it?**

I. He uses His God-given platform to speak the truth.

That's one way to thin out the crowds isn't it? Just preach the truth. He took advantage of the pressure and remembered what was most important – letting people know the truth. But what sometimes happens when a preacher or Christian businessman becomes popular, is they sometimes begin to loosen up on their biblical stances *for fear of offending any followers or if it's a Christian business, fear of losing potential customers*. How many Christian organizations or businesses lately who started out on solid biblical principles, and have been blessed by God for it, have begun to cave into the pressures put on them by the crowds? Jesus, instead of backing off from His stance on peoples' need for righteousness, leaned into it. He used the God-given platform to speak truth. And instead of letting Himself be distracted by all of the physical needs of the people with all their demands, He remembered the spiritual needs were the most important.

Mark doesn't present Jesus' popularity in a way that most of the world would. Many in our world tend to idolize popularity and try to promote themselves through various platforms like Facebook or Twitter with the goal of gaining more followers. There's even a popular musical today called "*Jesus Christ, Superstar*" if that tells you anything. Our world tells you that the more that follow

you, the more successful you are. Mark, however, reminds us that popularity can be a real hindrance to success in God's eyes. It's been said that there's **three supreme testings in this life**:

1. The testing of **suffering** and **poverty**.
2. The testing of **obscurity** and **unrecognition**.
3. The testing of **prosperity** and **applause**.

I think we all know that **suffering** is a great test. Persecution and poverty and pain, physical or emotional or relational. Suffering tries us and refines us. And if we're going through it well we'll let it push us closer to God and not further away. But **we don't often think about the testings like obscurity or popularity**.

Obscurity tests may happen when a man he knows he has great talent or gifts or is aware maybe that God has given him certain, great capacities, maybe to preach or teach or serve in a certain area, or who know they would be perfect for a job, but for the time being is going unnoticed and neglected. God has that person in the shadows, as Swindoll likes to say, waiting for His perfect timing to call them to a specific task He has. Many in that obscure waiting can turn sour and bitter in that neglect or lack of appreciation while they wait to be called or noticed. Those times is obscurity, when you're off scene, is one of the most important times of your life. You must be faithful in the obscurity if you want God to call you out of the shadows and back into something more significant. Be faithful in the obscurity and neglect. In your heart, you have to be able to serve without any applause before you can serve with the applause because just the opposite of obscurity, **popularity**, is too a great test.

Those who pass through their time of neglect and do become popular or well-known or given some sort of spotlight, can be corrupted by the success and adulation they receive. As already mentioned, they can be tempted to please the crowds *for fear of losing their newfound significance or fear of losing followers or potential business*. Also, don't forget that the spotlight and the platform also comes with a full calendar and a full calendar can become a hindrance to our faithfulness to God. Not only that, it can overwhelm men and cause them to break down under the unusual and many responsibilities.ⁱⁱ What's interesting is that Jesus faced all 3 of these tests in just a few short years and passed through them all victoriously, but not without feeling it just like we do.

One of the things Jesus had to do to manage the ministry pressure was to withdraw from the crowd at times.

II. He finds moments to **withdraw** from the crowd.

That's something He did for short periods of time on occasion. He would get away. Verse 7 says, "He withdrew to the sea with His disciples." According to the other gospels it seems that He left and went and prayed and then called the apostles and then the crowds caught up later. And there are times in ministry when you do need to get away. That's important for hanging in there for the long haul. You have to have moments of solitude with the Lord to minister to the crowds.

I'm not talking about running away from the pressures and caving in to the temptations to quit. Our humanity has its limitations and it needs a break at times. We learned that last time we were in Mark that's the whole reason God created the Sabbath and rested on the seventh day. Jesus even, having laid aside some of His divine attributes to take on flesh, experienced those human limitations as well. He experienced hunger and thirst and being worn out. I think He did feel the stress of ministry while He was serving His heart out under the sun. I was super thankful for the opportunity to get away recently. It was great. I needed it. And you know, if you're diligent in your work and

you give your best every day, you don't need to apologize or feel guilty for getting away. Everyone needs a time of rest. Your friends and family might even appreciate it if you take a time of rest. It's important for hanging in there for the long haul.

III. **When the pressure was on, Jesus made sure to pray.**

Luke 6:12 also complements the text we're in today with more detail, saying, "It was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God. And when day came, He called His disciples to Him and chose twelve of them, whom He also named as apostles." He prayed, and He prayed about what God would have do next. When things get busy, that's what you need to do! The less time you have to pray, the more you need to pray. We already went over that in 1:38 but we I'm betting we need to hear it again already. It's how we are re-filled and re-strengthened and refocused to do God's will and discern the next steps in God's will for us.

You know, God has limitless spiritual resources for us in the ministries that He calls us too, but we've got to go to Him in prayer to receive His gracious resources. He has designed it so we are dependent upon Him and nothing takes place of spiritual significance without our dependence on Him. A believer that doesn't pray or a church that doesn't pray won't be effective, even if they're a busy believer or a busy church.

IV. **When the pressure is on, Jesus delegated.**

To delegate is to entrust some tasks to others. That's what the Father had him do. Not even Jesus didn't do it all on His own! "He appointed the twelve, so that they would be with Him and that He could send them out to preach, and to have authority to cast out demons." Right now He is essentially saying to them, "You guys are the ones I have chosen to be my disciples and will do My work." There was a lot of people following Jesus but these twelve were going to be distinct. They would be by Him and learn from Him so that they could do what He was doing.

And it's important that we get to know these men because they become the spiritual leaders who form the foundation of the Church, they rule over the twelve tribes in the Millennium and their names are on the foundation stones of the New Jerusalem. God honors them throughout eternity for their ministry. And **what's encouraging about them is that they were ordinary men.** The weren't these stained-glass, unrelatable and unrealistic saints. They were ordinary men from ordinary walks of life that God used to do big things for Him. What's that say about us? **He can use us the ordinaries that we are and loves to use the ordinaries.**

Putting the list of apostles together can be a little difficult because sometimes they're called by their given names and sometimes by their nicknames. I think the nicknames make it fun and lets us know they weren't just a bunch of stiff-necked Pharisees.

1. **Simon Peter** (his means "the rock" because that's what he thought himself to be in his pride but after his denial of Jesus, a rock is what Jesus needed him to be and the testimony that Jesus is the Christ is "the rock" he would stand on).
2. **James** (brother of John, son of Zebedee; one of the "sons of thunder")
3. **John** (his brother, the other thunder caller – they were called this because on one occasion when the gang was traveling through Samaria and they were met with some opposition and weren't welcomed so James and John, seeing this, said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" – kind of like Sodom and Gomorrah or something. Jesus had to tell them I didn't come to destroy men's lives but to save them!)

4. **Andrew** (Simon Peter's brother)
5. **Philip** (name means "lover of horses")
6. **Bartholomew** (also called Nathanael)
7. **Matthew** (also called Levi – the "gift of God")
8. **Thomas** (also called Didymus – "the twin")
9. **James the Less** (son of Alphaeus – might have been the shorter one of the two James')
10. **Judas (not Iscariot)**(who is also called Lebbaeus (Mt. 10:3) and Thaddeus – poor guy had three names!)
11. **Simon** (the Zealot)
12. **Judas Iscariot** (always listed last and called the one who betrayed Him – He was replaced by **Matthias** in Acts 1).

It's really quite the crew if you study them more in depth. You've got **three sets of brothers** and Lord knows how hard it is for some brothers to work together! You've got **two extremes in the group** – Simon the zealot and Matthew the tax-collector. Zealots were anti-Roman insurrectionists, who might even take out a Jew who worked for Rome.ⁱⁱⁱ But Matthew worked for Rome. And Jesus has them work together. Only Jesus could bring these men together and they be a functioning unit. **Three of them are listed in the same place of order each time** with the same names under them – Simon Peter is always mentioned first, then Philip 5th, and James son of Alphaeus 9th, which some say may indicate that even within the apostolic group they had a "small group" structure.

A question to ask is **why 12?** I think there's a specific reason for that. I think there is an unmistakable message being sent to the leaders of the nation of Israel that Jesus is replacing them with His apostles.^{iv} They have rejected the Messiah and the truth and are unfit for leadership. They're hypocritical and corrupt and so Jesus choosing twelve is saying I'm replacing the leadership over the twelve tribes. In Luke 22:28 He said to them "You have stood by Me in My trials; and just as My Father has granted Me a kingdom, I grant you that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Those are Millennial thrones Jesus is talking about – when Jesus returns, when the kingdom actually comes (Luke 22:18). So **it seems that this is a judgment on the unqualified religious leaders of Israel. He is giving them authority** and taking it away from the Pharisees.

And in chapter 6:7-12, after having been at His side learning from Him, they are sent out to do everything He has been doing **with His authority**. He delegates His ministry to these twelve. By doing this, **He's getting more done, He's deflating some the pressure and He's preparing for the future.**

❖ **The effective and lasting ministry is a ministry that delegates.**

It's also very rewarding. **If a ministry is going to be effective, it must have a leader who delegates. Making disciples is all about delegation. You have to take risks and put people in positions to grow and to discover their gifts.**

One of the things I have never been able to understand is when certain church members start complaining when the pastor or the leaders of ministries step back to let someone else lead or take a leading role. I've been part of small groups where someone who wasn't normally the leader stepped in to lead a study for a few weeks or something like that and people started complaining or leaving because they weren't as good as the leader they were used to. That doesn't make any sense to me. It makes me think, "Where do you think the leaders who are leaders now learned to lead?"

They learned by their leaders giving them the opportunity to lead. Everyone has to start somewhere. It takes time and practice to develop gifts. If we're going to make disciples here and have a vibrant ministry, we have to give people opportunities to **step up** and those who are asked to step up need too if the Lord is leading them too. We want our church to be a place where people have that opportunity.

Jesus didn't do it all, **He trained and delegated**. Moses couldn't do it all, you remember that? He delegated. That was his father-in-law, Jethro's advice. Jethro watched Moses for a bit and realized this guys trying to do the work of several men. He said, "The thing that you are doing [Moses] is not good. You will surely wear out, both yourself and these people who are with you, for the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone." Jethro suggested he select able men who feared God and were men of truth to **share the load** (Ex. 18:21). The whole congregation of Israel was actually hurt by Moses' trying to do it all. Moses listened to his father-in-law and was blessed.

In similar fashion, we know from other Scriptures like 1 Corinthians 14 that the local church was never meant to be a one-man show either. For us to grow and be healthier and more vibrant and more effective, **we have to learn to value and appreciate everyone's roles – everyone's gifts – everyone's value to the church family. Every one of us here has a strategic role in our church's effectiveness. Without delegation, the life of the church is stifled.**

Train and delegate. Remember Titus? Don't do it all Titus...appoint elders. Remember 2 Timothy 2:2? "The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." Train and delegate. Train and delegate.

One of the best places for that training and delegating to take place is in small groups. Just recently we started an in-home marriage Bible study with 6 different couples and I can't tell you how refreshing it is, especially after the isolation period we've had. I'll just be frank because someone was frank with me this week about it: **Our church needs small groups.** You need more than just to be acquaintances on Sunday morning but to be part of a group that's growing together. It's personal. You get know where each other lives. You get to know each other's personalities and experiences. By the way, you're a lot less likely to harshly judge someone when you understand what they've been through. Someone in our group this week said they have such a greater sense of belonging. Small groups provide more people with opportunities to serve and to invite their friends to something other than church. Is it easy to faithfully attend or make time for a small group? Not always, but it's absolutely worth it.

And don't forget, one of the ways you may be able to serve is by coming to our meeting on Wednesday night about how to reach the youth and the college students. We want to make sure our youth are getting the tools they need and the questions they have answered so that they can stand in their faith against a culture filled with evolution and secularism. We want them better prepared.

ⁱ Ray Stedman, *The Power of His Presence*, (Grand Rapids: Discovery House Publishers, 2006), 18.

ⁱⁱ Paul Dwight Moody & Arthur Percy Fit, *The Shorter Life of D. L. Moody*, (Chicago: The Bible Institute Colportage Association), 86-87.

ⁱⁱⁱ Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *The Life of Messiah from a Jewish-Messianic Perspective, Vol. 2* (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2017), 270.

^{iv} John MacArthur, *Twelve Ordinary Men*, accessed 26 June 2020, <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/41-14/twelve-ordinary-men>