

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Dave Smith

Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: BREATHLESS

(studies in the Gospel of Mark)

The Team Jesus Chooses

(Mark 3:7-19)

Study #6

Introduction: I choose...

“Choosing up sides” is an important ritual before any weekend game between friends. But this choosing rite is packed with pressure.

Nobody I know likes to be the “last guy/gal standing.”

If I was ever the first player chosen, it was a long time ago. In more recent years when I’m on the field or the court, I’m mercifully chosen, but it’s usually somewhere near the end. (I would have to choose my playing partners very carefully to guarantee getting chosen first...)

Now I have known some people who were consistently chosen last. Almost to a person (male or female), after several of these experiences, they have chosen to simply not play anymore. It’s too painful to watch as everyone else gets picked and then to listen as the team captains argue about who will have to take them.

But if the players feel pressure to get chosen, the choosers feel the pressure, too. If you are the captain, your choice of players will determine whether your team wins or loses. And whether the game is football, basketball, ultimate Frisbee, or tiddlywinks, you want to choose well.

This morning we get to watch Jesus choose His team.

His team is going to be tasked with establishing His Kingdom after He ascends to Heaven. As His team’s Captain, it is critical that Jesus choose wisely. We’ll reserve judgment of His choices until the very end.

When we last saw Jesus...

When we last saw Jesus He was healing a man with a withered hand in a Jewish synagogue - on the Sabbath. This followed right on the heels of His having allowed His disciples to pluck the heads of grain off of stalks of wheat while walking through a field - again, on the Sabbath.

Jesus was proving Himself “Lord of the Sabbath” and was starting to draw a distinction between obedience to God and obedience to the picky rules of the Pharisees.

His way was the way of grace; theirs, the way of Law. His, the way of freedom; theirs, of bondage. His - going back to God’s original intent; theirs - straying into a shackling legalism that never entered God’s mind.

Following these two Sabbath incidents we follow Jesus from the synagogue to the Sea of Galilee.

Jesus at the Sea (vv. 7-12)

Convergence at the Sea (vv. 7b-8a)

Jesus and disciples: to the Sea! (v. 7a)

[7a] Jesus withdrew to the sea with His disciples

He has traveled with His disciples, by now a group of at least five men we have already met.

Some of these guys were fishermen and would have been very familiar with the Sea and its ways. As we continue to follow Jesus’ life in Mark’s Gospel, we’ll get more and more familiar with the Sea of Galilee, too.

We've already watched Jesus call two sets of brothers (Simon and Andrew; James and John) to follow Him at the Sea, and we'll see Him at the Sea many more times before we're done.

But Jesus has done more than simply take a stroll down to the beach.

Mark tells us that He has "withdrawn" to the Sea. He is looking for some rest and refreshment. He's just had serious confrontations with the Pharisees and He's tired.

He took refuge from the crowds by going to the seashore, perhaps not to the part of the lake right by Capernaum, but the more deserted stretches of beach to the north where the Jordan River enters.

And if He went to the Sea to get away from the crowds, we can at least say that the attempt was strikingly unsuccessful.

Crowds follow close behind (v. 7b)

[7b]...and a great multitude... followed

He is facing growing opposition from religious types (Pharisees, scribes), but He is enormously popular with the regular, everyday people of Israel.

And it is an extremely diverse crowd that has made its way to Jesus at the Sea of Galilee.

A diverse crowd (v. 7c-8a)

[7c]...and a great multitude from Galilee followed; and also from Judea, [8] and from Jerusalem, and from Idumea, and beyond the Jordan, and the vicinity of Tyre and Sidon

There is geographic diversity.

People from the region of Galilee, where Jesus is located, flocked to Him. But they also streamed north from the province of Judea and the capitol city of Jerusalem.

They also came from Idumea¹, an area south even of Judea. As far as we know Jesus never traveled to Idumea, but the folks there have heard of Him and they have traveled the nearly one hundred and twenty miles to see Him.

Others have come from east of the Jordan River, which would have been the region of Perea. Herod ruled over Perea and the people there traveled to the northern portion of Galilee to see Jesus.

And still others had come from the north, around Tyre and Sidon, fifty miles away, to see Jesus.

There is a very wide-ranging geographic area represented here. And there is just as diverse an ethnic range in the crowd.

Those from Galilee, Judea and Jerusalem, of course, were Jews, like Jesus was.

But those from Idumea were not full-blood Jews, but a mixed race, as were those from the Transjordan region of Perea. And those from Tyre and Sidon were Gentile, through and through.²

This is a diverse crowd no matter how you slice it. Jesus' pull is impressive, and this is the first time Mark has given us a hint as to how popular He was becoming.

They came from the south, the north, and the east as Mark says, "following" Jesus.

But we are not to read that is if the crowds were "card-carrying disciples" in any serious sense.

They were desperate to follow Jesus, all right but it was not the desperation of faith. It was desperation born out of a longing for Him to perform miracles that they made their way to Jesus.

¹ This is the only time Idumea is mentioned in the New Testament. A region very unpopular among the Jews, for being, at best (as they would say it) part-Jewish.

² Already, Jesus is fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy that the Messiah would be a **"light to the Gentiles"** (Isaiah 49:6).

A desperate crowd (v. 8b)

[8b]...a great number of people heard of all that He was doing and came to Him.

They haven't come to Jesus to sit at His feet and listen to Him teach. They haven't come to worship. They haven't come to find out if He really is the Messiah promised by the prophets.

No, they are sick and they want healing. They are oppressed by the devil and they want freedom.

So, Jesus was surrounded - quite literally - by these desperate people. And He took a precautionary step that highlights what kind of a crowd this really was.

Caution at the Sea (vv. 9-10)

Jesus' instructions to His disciples (v.9)

[9] And He told His disciples that a boat should stand ready for Him because of the crowd, so that they would not crowd Him.

This is not a low-energy crowd like what we experience when we go to get our driver's license renewed and, sheep-like, wait our turn in line.

It's not like going to the Silverado theatre to buy a ticket for a movie. It's more like the crowd that screams for the attention of the main act at a rock concert.

These folks were not patiently waiting in line to see Jesus. The word our Bibles translate "crowd" at the end of the verse describes a pressing and a crushing mob.

Seeing the mob's potential for violence, Jesus had His disciples prepare a boat (presumably one of their own fishing boats) near the shore into which He could find safety in the event things got out of hand.³

But while He was with them, He gave Himself to meeting their needs and to touching their misery.

The crowd's pressuring ways (v. 10)

[10] for He had healed many, with the result that all those who had afflictions pressed around Him in order to touch Him.

All of these people, Jews and Gentiles from the north and the south and the east, have come to see if Jesus could do something for them, as they had heard He had helped others.

Those who were sick were falling all over themselves to get to Jesus to touch Him. And some were simply falling down in front of Him.

Silencing at the Sea (vv. 11-12)

Unclean spirits cry out (v. 11)

[11] Whenever the unclean spirits saw Him, they would fall down before Him and shout, "You are the Son of God!"⁴

Out of the whole crowd, the only ones who really knew who they were dealing with were the demons who were tormenting the people they had possessed.

The sick thought Jesus was a miracle-working magician who could meet their needs, but the demons knew that He was the in-the-flesh Son of God!

³ Even though they are now following Jesus, they still have access to a boat. Evidently they did not totally abandon their fishing ways - and there is no censure for not having done so.

⁴ There seems to be an intentional contrast to the less than reverential behavior of the physically sick. Some think that the demons hoped to expose Jesus' identity in order to escape His authority over them. But this event is a non-contest.

And they fell down, not out of a sense of worship, but because they had to recognize His sovereignty and authority. They were left without a choice but to fall down before Him.

But Jesus didn't allow them to announce His true identity.

Unclean spirits are silenced (v. 12)

[12] And He earnestly warned them not to tell who He was.

Why did He forbid them to identify who He was?

Well, for one thing, He wasn't all that thrilled with the idea of having demons be the ones to tell who He was. But even more than that, He was on His Father's timetable. He would wait until it was time to let the word out about who He really was. And for now, at least in this setting, Jesus was content to remain the Messiah and the Son of God *incognito*.

Wondering...

Now, what we have just seen is a summary glimpse of Jesus at Kingdom work. He is engaged in Messianic ministry.

His influence is spreading and He is becoming more and more popular. Crowds follow Him everywhere He goes. He's making an impact in Galilee, in all of Palestine and even in the Gentile world.

And Mark has written a good book. A good book flows. One section logically follows another.

So, ask yourself why THIS passage (vv. 7-12) showing Jesus nearly crushed by a desperate mob is immediately followed by the choosing of the twelve apostles.

What about what precedes makes what follows FIT?

Keep that question at the back of your mind as we move from the lakeside to the hillside.

Jesus on the Mountain (vv. 13-18)

From Lakeside to Hillside (v. 13a)

[13a] And He went up on the mountain...

Mark tells us that Jesus went up on "the mountain." We have no idea which mountain he has in mind. The region of Galilee is pretty hilly, so there were lots of hills to choose from if you wanted a mountaintop experience.

If may be that this one was one which Jesus and the disciples went to frequently (hence "the" mountain).

But whatever mountain it was, Jesus has climbed this mountain for a reason.

Why a Mountain? (vv. 13b-15)

He chose His team (v. 13b)

[13b]...and summoned those whom He Himself wanted, and they came to Him.

It is significant that Jesus summoned these disciples, that He invited them to an inner circle. In doing this, He broke the mold of the normal way of doing things.

In the first century Jewish world, a would-be disciple would approach the rabbi he wanted to follow, and would hope that the rabbi would agree to mentor him.

That's generally the way it is in our own day when it comes to college. Oh, an exceptional athlete or an academically gifted student will be courted by a school. But most everybody else makes application to a school and hopes to be accepted.

When it came to choosing the twelve, He reversed the trend and treated these guys like superstars. He chose them.

He was very intentional about His choices. This was not haphazard. He made deliberate conscious choices about each and every one of those whom He called.

And they willingly hiked up the mountain to be with Him.

A team of twelve apprentices (vv. 14b-15)

Twelve

[14a] And He appointed⁵ twelve, so that they would be with Him...

Mark makes sure that we know that He selected twelve. There were, of course, twelve tribes of ancient Israel, so twelve is a significant number. But never is the group of apostles referred to as anything like “a new Israel.” No.

God still has a plan for the nation of Israel and Jesus’ choice of twelve here may have as much to do with having a manageable sized group that could all fit into a small-ish fishing boat as it does with symbolism.

This group of twelve, chosen out of the larger group of those who followed Jesus,⁶ will receive the Lord’s private teaching. There will still be the larger group of disciples, but the twelve will constitute an inner group.

They will travel together. They will become a small, close-knit team. They will share basic resources and accommodations. For the bulk of the next three years, these twelve and Jesus will be together. In fact, that was His point. He wanted these men to be with Him.

That is the thing: to be with Jesus. Day in and day out, on the road and in the towns and villages, on the Sea of Galilee and on short trips outside of Israel, in Jerusalem - always together.

⁵ Some see the word “appointed” (which can be translated “made” or “created”) and conclude that what Jesus is doing is bringing into existence a new Israel, a new twelve tribe entity, which will become the church. This interpretation stretches a minor grammatical point past the breaking point. The translation “appoint” is perfectly appropriate and a common translation of the word.

⁶ Lane believes that the twelve were the only ones following Jesus. Not me...

And for what purpose did He choose them? What did He intend them to do?

Preaching, spiritual warfare

[14b]...and that He could send them out to preach, [15] and to have authority to cast out the demons.

Thus far, preaching and exorcism have been distinctive ministries of Jesus; they are to be distinctive ministries of the twelve.

We can’t miss that Jesus is going to give these guys authority to do what He has been doing. They are apprentices who will become associates, extensions of His own mission.

They will preach the Good News of the Kingdom and they will have authority to cast out demons - just like Jesus.

Thus far in Mark’s Gospel, we have met five of the twelve. In the list that Mark gives us, we meet the other seven.

The Twelve (vv. 16-18)

[16] And He appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom He gave the name Peter), [17] and James, the son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James (to them He gave the name Boanerges, which means “Sons of Thunder”); [18] and Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Zealot; [19] and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Him.

I’m breaking the twelve into three categories, and the first grouping consists of men of renown. These are guys we know.

Men of renown (16-18a)

Simon Peter

The first apostle named is Simon Peter - and there is no attempt to explain the significance of the nickname Jesus gives Simon.

From elsewhere we know that “petros” is the Greek equivalent of the Aramaic “cephas” which means “rock” or “stone.”

It refers to the confession Peter will make sometime later that Jesus is *“the Christ, the Son of the living God!”* And it also probably speaks to Jesus’ vision for the kind of man Simon would become - solid. Rocky-like.

We will see Simon Peter a lot in our study of Mark’s Gospel.

He was a natural-born leader and was often bold where others shrank back. He had backbone. There are times when Peter is almost unbelievably courageous - but then he will surprise us with His cowardice.

At times, we’ll marvel at Peter’s spiritual insight, and then cringe as Jesus has to rebuke Him for speaking without thinking (a failing that reminds me of someone I shave every morning...).

He asks just the right question on one day, and then blurts out something silly the next. I happen to love Simon Peter - and I think you will, too, if you don’t already know him.

Next, Mark gives us James and John, brothers who are sons of Zebedee.

James and John

Like Peter, James and John were fishermen. And, like Peter, these brothers could be pretty bombastic, which is no doubt why Jesus gave them the nickname, “Sons of Thunder”!

They, along with Peter, made up the inner sanctum among the twelve. Peter, James and John were privileged by Jesus to see things that the others didn’t see.

They were there at the Transfiguration. They were there when Jesus raised a little girl up from the dead. They were there, with Jesus, in the Garden of Gethsemane when He prayed so fervently that He sweated great drops of blood.

They had an impetuous streak a mile wide. Once, they wanted to call down fire on Jesus’ enemies. Another time they asked for the places of honor, next to Jesus, in the coming kingdom.

James and John were not the only set of brothers among the apostles. Simon had a brother, too: Andrew.

Andrew

Andrew lived under the shadow of his brother and is not prominent in the Gospels. We see him as a question asker. I have always wondered if Andrew was a bit more retiring, more tentative, less confident.

Philip

Andrew is followed in Mark’s list by Philip. In fact, Mark doesn’t mention Philip again anywhere in his book.

John does let us hear Philip’s voice, when he and Andrew came to Jesus with news that some Gentiles wanted to see Jesus.

Matthew⁷

Matthew is the same guy referred to elsewhere as Levi. Mark has told us about Jesus’ call to this tax-collector to follow Him. And we have seen how he promptly threw a party for his tax-collecting friends and his new friends - Jesus and the other disciples.

But after his calling and his party, we never hear about Matthew again.

Thomas

And then there was Thomas, aka “Doubting Thomas.” It is in this list only that we see Thomas in Mark’s book. John features him as a question asker, and as a man who needed some proof-positive before he would believe that Jesus was actually risen from the dead.

⁷ In Mark 2:14 Matthew is referred to as the son of Alphaeus. If it is the same man, then he is brother to James, constituting a third set of brothers among the apostles.

So, we know something about these seven. A good bit about Peter, James and John, very little about the other four. But we know more about them, by far, than we know about the next four in the list. I refer to them as men of obscurity.

Men of obscurity (v. 18b)

Bartholomew, James the son of Alphaeus⁸, Thaddaeus⁹, and Simon the Zealot¹⁰ are four of Jesus' twelve apostles - and they are not mentioned anywhere in the Gospels or anywhere else in the New Testament outside of these lists.

And then, saving the worst for last, Mark gives us the twelfth apostle: Judas Iscariot.

The betrayer - Judas Iscariot

Ironically, Judas is probably the only one of the twelve from the supposedly more spiritual southern region of Judea. His name "Iscariot" is thought to designate him as a "man from Kerioth", a city in Judea.¹¹

Mark wants us to know at this early point where Judas' story is going. He will be the one of the twelve who will betray Jesus into the hands of the Jewish leadership and the Romans who will put Him to death on a cross.¹²

And that is the apostolic band. This is the team Jesus chose.

⁸ Possibly referred to in Mark 15:40, but that is not at all certain.

⁹ Evidently, the same man as "**Judas, the son of James**" listed by Luke.

¹⁰ Two of my commentaries give two very different understandings regarding Simon's "zeal." Dallas Seminary's Bible Knowledge Commentary says, "Zealot may have referred to his zeal for God and not to his political associations." But R.T. France writes that "Zealot probably does refer to Simon's nationalistic zeal." My own opinion is that while the Zealots were not a political entity as of the time of Jesus, by the time Mark wrote they were such, so Mark's readers would have assumed he was a political zealot by the designation.

¹¹ Honestly, "Iscariot" could refer to a number of things.

¹² Here we are given reason to recall that Mark wrote His Gospel after the cross and resurrection to the believing community and to the unbelieving world.

Impressed? Well, many who have looked long and hard at Jesus' intrepid band of apostles have been impressed by the lack of superstar power on the team. A contemporary might have been tempted to wonder if Jesus' team had what it took to win?

In fact, a management consultant evaluating Jesus' choices might well have recommended He go back to the drawing board.¹³

Conclusion:

But, win they did.

After Jesus ascended into Heaven, these men (along with a few other men and women) took the Message to the world. They performed works of power, loved as Jesus had loved, battled against spiritual enemies and carried on His mission.

They fulfilled the remarkable assignment He had given them. And what is just as remarkable is the general unremarkability of these guys.

Through the centuries some people have slipped off the narrow fence on the side of canonizing the apostles and treating them as spiritual superheroes. That's a mistake. But we also don't want to suggest that they were losers, either. They were neither.

They were, by and large, simple, ordinary, normal men chosen by Jesus and equipped by being with Jesus for extraordinary work.

That was the Jesus way of "Kingdom Building 101". It is still the Jesus way. He chooses ordinary people for a spectacular work, fueled by the power of the Holy Spirit.

And today Jesus welcomes you to His team!

¹³ See Appendix

Appendix

Jordan Management Consultants
Woodcrafters Carpenter Shop
Nazareth 25922

Attention: Jesus, Son of Joseph
Dear Sir:

Thank you for submitting the resumes of the twelve men you have picked for management positions in your new organization. All of them have now completed our battery of tests. We have not only run the results through our computer, but have arranged personal interviews for each of them with our psychologist and vocational aptitude consultant. The profiles of all tests are included and you will want to study them carefully.

As part of our service, and for your guidance, we offer some general comments for your consideration.

It is the staff opinion that most of your nominees are lacking in background, education, and vocational aptitude for the type of enterprise you are undertaking. They do not grasp the concept of “team.”

We would recommend that you continue your search for persons with more substantial education, definable aptitudes, and proven experience in areas of management, marketing and public relations.

Some specific analysis follows:

- Simon Peter is emotionally unstable and given to fits of temper.
- Andrew has absolutely no qualities of leadership.
- The two sons of Zebedee, James and John, place personal interest above company loyalty.
- Thomas demonstrates a negative attitude that would tend to undermine morale.
- We feel that it is our duty to tell you that Matthew has been blacklisted by the Greater Jerusalem Business Bureau.
- James, the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus definitely have radical tendencies, and will likely prove difficult in stressful situations.

One of the candidates does show great potential. He is a man of ability and resourcefulness, meets people well, has a keen business mind and has contacts in high places. He is highly motivated and ambitious. We do recommend Judas Iscariot as your controller/CFO.

All of the other profiles are self-explanatory and we feel confident that you will concur with our findings.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide our professional management analysis and look forward to assisting you with any subsequent staff analyses.

Sincerely yours,

Jordan Management Consultants¹⁴

¹⁴ Courtesy of the Wittenburg Door magazine