



## Follow

### Mark 3.7-35

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We've taken a break for a few weeks to look at David and Goliath, but today we're coming back to our series on the book of Mark. So let's just quickly remember where we've been...

Mark is one of the four accounts of the life of Jesus Christ. And we learn very quickly at the start of Mark's account that Jesus Christ isn't just a wise old teacher, he's not just a miracle worker, he's the Son of God. The Son of God who is the authoritative author of creation who's entered into the story he's writing to set things right.

And as we read through the story, Jesus is regularly interacting with three groups of people. The crowds who are captivated, the followers who follow and the opposition who oppose. And the whole book is written as an invitation for all who read to enter into this new Kingdom that Jesus is bringing on earth—a new Kingdom where even the worst kind of people find grace and mercy and where even the most awful oppression is able to be lifted and taken away. So let's jump back in.

Do you remember the most immediate thing that happened right before today's passage?

Take a look at the previous verse, verse 6...

text: Mark 3.6 - Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.

There's a murder plot. And it's with the murder plot lingering that we pick up the story again today.

And we find Jesus—with all this tension— withdrawing to the lake. But there's no relief at the lake. The crowds are there pressing in. And the crowds are so big, it's dangerous. It says they pushed forward and crowded. These are words that mean to violently trample.

Jesus has become so popular now, look at what we learn in verse 8 about Jesus popularity...

text: Mark 3.8 - 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.

Now, let's just think for a minute about where these people are coming from. Up until now, the crowds have really only come from the towns and villages around and along the shores of the Sea of Galilee in the north of Israel.

But now, the news about Jesus has reached Jerusalem, the big metropolitan city. And not only that but it's about 100 miles away—at least a 3-4 day's walk.

Idumea is even further south. About maybe 200 miles south of Galilee. And Tyre and Sidon to the north aren't as far away, but they're in a different country—these are Gentile places.

So, now when we're talking about people coming to see Jesus, they're not just coming from the local region around Galilee, or even from within Israel itself, they're coming from 200 miles around.

Here's what Mark is trying to show us about Jesus: his popularity cuts across not only geographical boundaries, but national and ethnic boundaries. Jesus Christ has a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic appeal as people from all different backgrounds are coming to him.

So, while the Pharisees and the Herodians are plotting to kill him, the crowds are coming to admire him. But it seems that only a small few have come to follow him.

In fact, instead of coming to follow Jesus, most want to make Jesus follow them. The crowds want him to be a miracle worker, the opposition either want him dead or want him to be a compliant companion to their legalistic religion.

But Jesus Christ isn't a follower—he's to be followed. He's the authoritative author of creation. And it seems that throughout Mark, the people who are most frustrated with Jesus are those who want Jesus to follow them—and of course he refuses to do so.

And perhaps that's how you've been feeling about Jesus lately, maybe a little frustrated with him. Maybe very frustrated with him. Well, it could be that you're frustrated because you're trying to get him to follow you rather than you following him.

Well, what we're going to see in the rest of this passage is what it looks like to flip things around. Instead of trying to get Jesus to follow you and me, we'll see how you and me can learn to follow him.

So, should we take a look?

Well, as the Captivated Crowds from 200 miles away are pushing forward, something surprising happens, there's a very surprising confession. That's our first point:

## 1. A Surprising Confession: 11-12

Take a look with me at verse 11...

text: Mark 3.11-12 - Whenever the impure spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, "You are the Son of God." **12** But he gave them strict orders not to tell others about him.

So, here we have Jesus, the Son of God, come to earth. And not only has he come, but he's been traveling around attempting to reveal to everyone through his preaching and through his actions that he really is the Son of God.

But here when someone confesses that he's the Son of God, he shuts them up. Why?

Well, the impure spirits clearly had knowledge of who Jesus is. They are experiencing, first-hand, the author of creation exercising his total authority as Son of God over them. Of course they know who he is.

Yet, Jesus doesn't want them to speak.

And it's because the kind of Kingdom Jesus has come to bring is not based on knowledge alone. If it were based on knowledge, then even the demons would be welcomed in. But demons—who have knowledge of who Jesus is—are always being cast out and sent away.

Instead, what we're going to see is the Kingdom Jesus brings is based on both calling and obedience. So it's only those who first, welcome Jesus calling on their life; and secondly, in response, live a life of obedience, who really enter into the new Kingdom Jesus is bringing on earth.

Of course, you need some knowledge of the Kingdom to enter in, but knowledge alone isn't enough. And also, if you're someone who's standing on the outside of Christianity looking in and you're just waiting until you've got all the knowledge before you're willing to take a step in—you'll never get all the knowledge.

Christianity is best understood by entering in...

So, if it isn't by knowledge alone that someone enters into the Kingdom of Heaven, how do you

enter? Well, take a look at the next few verses. In these verses we find a surprising calling.

## 2. A Surprising Calling: 13-19

Look at verse 13...

text: Mark 3.13 - Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him.

Now, what did Jesus do with them after he called them and they came to him. Well, the main theme in this paragraph is naming. Jesus names them...

Look again at verse 14...

text: Mark 3.14 - He appointed twelve [designating them apostles]...

Now, the NIV translation we have in front of us, puts this in a footnote, and the footnote says "designating them apostles"

That word, 'designating' is actually the word 'named'. He 'named' them, he gave their little group of 12 a name: apostles—which means sent ones. Whatever their identity was before, fisherman, tax collector, accountant, politician—whatever it was, they had a new name—apostle.

And not only that, but did you notice that Jesus reaches into their individual lives? He renames 3 of them. He goes to Simon and renames him Peter—which means "rock". He goes to James and John and he renames them Sons of Thunder.

That's the theme of this paragraph, Jesus is renaming the 12 men he called to be with him. Why does he do that?

Well, all through the Bible, naming someone or something has shaping power. A name could shape who or what someone becomes. In the Bible, naming was an act of authority. If you gave something or someone a name, it means you have authority...

Remember all the naming that goes on in Genesis? God names Adam and then he gives Adam authority over all of creation, to look after it, to develop it, to shape it. Then God sends Adam out on a mission to name all the living creatures.

If you name something or someone, it means you have authority. Now, maybe you think that's outdated, but is it?

illustration: When I was growing up my siblings gave me a nickname...And I hated it. I still hate it. Want to know what it is? Well, I'll never tell you what it is. Why? Because if you know that name, then you have power over me. If I were to tell you that name, you would have shaming power over me.

Or, in a more positive light, if there's someone you really love, like a spouse, or a boyfriend or girlfriend or a child—it's likely you have a nickname for them. That nickname reveals the depth of your relationship—they wouldn't let anyone but you call them that. And that name shapes who they become in some way.

Now, there's a limit when it comes to you and I naming someone or something. Some of you when you named your children picked a strong name because you want them to grow up strong, or an intelligent sounding name because you want them to be intelligent, or a beautiful name because you want them to grow up to be beautiful.

But very often they don't. That happens.

You see, our efforts to name often come up short. But not so with the Lord.

The Lord has ultimate naming power—He has the power to shape someone, it's an act of authority. So, when we get to the mountaintop where Jesus calls his 12 followers to be with him, he renames them. And he renames them with all the authority of the author of creation entering into the story with an eraser to erase their old name and give them a new one—to reshape them.

And what he does with the 12, he can do with you.

Whatever their old life was, he's reshaping them and he reshapes them in two ways. Did you notice the new life he calls them to in verse 14 and 15?

text: Mark 3.14-15 - He appointed twelve [designating them apostles] that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach **15** and to have authority to drive out demons.

The first way his renaming shapes them is that they are now to be with him. Now, very practically speaking, he was calling them to be his close inner circle of followers. These were to be the 12 who would go everywhere with him. Who he would teach and train for their own ministry.

But, remember, the Kingdom Jesus is bringing is not defined just by intellectual knowledge, there's

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a sense here that to be with him is to become like him. To be so close to someone means you begin to take on a resemblance—over time, by being with they become like him.

And we need to think about that for our own lives...the more time we spend with Jesus Christ, in his presence by reading God's Word, by prayer, by meeting together and worshipping together with other Christians—the more we do that, the more we will take on a resemblance to Christ.

Now the second way Jesus' renaming shapes the 12 is that they are also to go out—to go out to do two things, to preach—or to proclaim—his Kingdom and to live out his Kingdom practically—to do the very same things Jesus has come to do. Renaming in this case, gives these 12 men a new vocation.

And if you come back next week, we'll see just what this new vocation of being sent to preach looks like.

But for now, the whole future of God's Kingdom on earth hangs on these 12 men. Jesus—the author of creation—could have called any 12 people he wanted to be with him and to send them out. And he calls these 12.

And if I'm honest, I find it surprising that Jesus called these 12 young men—because they're not the creme-de-la-creme. They're tradesmen and traitors. None of them mighty, none of them wise, some overly arrogant, some quite dense. Yet they were his choice.

And though this might be a surprising calling, it's important because many today, if they're interested in Christianity, feel like they can't become a Christian because they don't feel worthy.

Well, just think with me for a minute about a few of these 12 men...

Later on in Mark 8, Peter actually tries to rebuke Jesus—and Jesus calls him Satan. He goes on to put his foot in his mouth again in chapter 9. And of course he famously after he declares in Mark 14 he would never disown Jesus, he goes on and denies knowing Jesus as Jesus' trial is going on.

Or what about James and John? When they get upset about a visit to Samaria, they want to call down fire from heaven to destroy an entire village.

And of course, Judas Iscariot who betrays Jesus for a bag of silver.

Not one of them is worthy of climbing the mountain with Jesus.

As I was thinking about this this week, I couldn't help but think of Psalm 24...

text: Psalm 24.3-4 - 3 Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord?

Who may stand in his holy place?

4 The one who has clean hands and a pure heart,  
who does not trust in an idol  
or swear by a false god.

Who can ascend the mountain to be with the Lord? Only the righteous, only the one who is worthy to ascend.

Not one of them could ascend the mountain, and yet, Jesus Christ in his great mercy and his wonderful grace invites—he calls—these 12 men up the mountain to be with him, he renames them and gives them not only a new purpose in life—to be people who help bring his Kingdom on earth—but he gives them his authority to do so.

And that can be true for you too. Of course you're not worthy. No one can ascend the mountain, and yet Jesus Christ in his great mercy and his wonderful grace is calling even you to come and be with him. And when you come, you get a new name too. You get his name—Christ-ian. Little Christ.

Won't you come? Come up the mountain and receive your new name and your new calling to spread his Kingdom here on earth.

You see, the Kingdom Jesus brings isn't based on knowledge, it's based on calling. But not only that, we're about to see it's also not defined by birth—you can't be born into it. And we'll see that in the last section where we come across two surprising charges.

### 3. Two Surprising Charges: 20-35

And the surprising charges come from the opposition. So far, we've met the captivated crowds, the followers who follow and now we meet the opposition. And there's two opposing groups, and the first one will surprise you.

#### A. Family: Crazy

In verse 20, Jesus and his 12 followers have come down from the mountainside and they've entered into a house—probably back to Peter and Andrew's house—and yet another crowd has gathered to meet him. But then look at verse 21...

text: Mark 3.20-21 - **21** When his **family** heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind."

You expect opposition from the religious leaders, you expect it from the political establishment, but you don't expect it from his family. This is actually the first time we meet Jesus' family in Mark's Gospel—but we know from the other accounts of Jesus' life in the New Testament, that there were lots of things about Jesus and the Kingdom he came to bring even **they** didn't fully understand.

In fact, so much so, they think it's a lunatic—"He is out of his mind." they say.

Now, the way Mark tells the story, he introduces the opposition from Jesus' family, but then he leaves it hanging like a good cliffhanger to focus the scene back on what is happening in the house.

So, with the tension of the impending arrival of Jesus' family, let's look at the second opposition party, our old friends, the religious leaders, who make a very bold accusation. Take a look...

#### B. Pharisees: Demon Possessed

text: Mark 3.22 - And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, 'He is possessed by [Be-el-zee-bull] Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons.'

And notice, these teachers of the law—these religious leaders—have come from Jerusalem. Remember, with the murder plot also going on in the background, you get the sense that the Pharisees have sent their best up from headquarters to oppose Jesus.

They accuse him of being under the authority of Satan. Now, Jesus responds to this with a wonderfully logical counterpoint.

He says in verse 23, take a look...

text: Mark 3.23-26 - 'How can Satan drive out Satan? **24** If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. **25** If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. **26** And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come.

That's as dumb as a football player actually **trying** to score goals in his own net—it can only result in a losing game.

He goes on in verse 27...

text: Mark 3.27 - In fact, no one can enter a strong man's house without first tying him up. Then he can plunder the strong man's house.

Do you know what Jesus is saying here?

He's saying to them. I'm not part of *Satan's* household. I'm the stronger man. I'm the one stronger than Satan and I've come in to his house to bind him up and to plunder his house of all those he's taken captive.

That's why Jesus is going around casting out demons. He's the stronger man come to free anyone who is being held captive by Satan. By the way, I think this is one of the reasons we don't see nearly as much demon possession as we did in the first century. Satan knows it's a losing strategy because the Stronger man—Jesus Christ—has come and will set the captives free.

And not only that, but look at verse 28...

text: Mark 3.28 - Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter...

It's here in verse 28 that Jesus Christ makes it abundantly clear not only why he came, but how someone can enter into the kingdom he is bringing on earth.

Remember, his Kingdom isn't defined by intellectual knowledge, it's defined by calling, by an invitation from Jesus Christ himself to come up the mountainside and enter in...

And by his sacrificial death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead that Jesus Christ not only defeats our enemy who is holding us captive, but he also makes a way for us to be forgiven of every wrong thing we've ever done, every wrong thought we've ever thought, and every wrong word we've ever spoken.

This is what this new kingdom is all about. Freedom from whatever holds us captive and forgiveness of sins. Don't you want that?

Well, the religious leaders didn't want that. They did not want to follow Jesus, they wanted him to follow them. And that's a dangerous position to be in. So, Jesus very graciously offers them a warning in verse 29. Take a look...

text: Mark 3.29-30 - **29** but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin.' **30** He said this because they were saying, 'He has an impure spirit.'

Now, what's Jesus saying here? Is he really saying there's an unforgivable sin? Is he really saying that the God of infinite grace and the God of infinite mercy can't forgive this one sin? That there's a sin that's beyond forgiveness? Well, yes. But what is it?

Well, first let me just say what it's not. It's not cursing the Holy Spirit. It's not taking the Lord's name in vain—bad as that is. It's not adultery or sexual sin. It's not lying, cheating or stealing. It's not pride or lust or worry. It's not stinginess or covetousness. It's not even murder or multiple murders or even genocide. All of those can be forgiven by the God of infinite grace and infinite mercy if you'll only come to him in humility to follow him.

What's unforgivable is very simply the ongoing, continual rejection of the witness of the Holy Spirit that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

That is what the teachers of the law were in danger of doing here. They were rejecting Jesus Christ—not willing to follow him.

And Jesus warning is that if they continue on this path, forgiveness won't be available to them because the more they harden their hearts against Jesus, the more they will become incapable of seeking the forgiveness he offers.

So Jesus very graciously offers them a warning before it's too late, to humble themselves in order to follow him, to come up the mountainside to be with him.

And once again the offer stands to each and every one of us, to humble ourselves and follow Jesus Christ. To stop trying to get him to follow us and to follow him instead. And when we do, we will find that he—the stronger man—frees us from whatever holds us captive and offers us forgiveness for every wrong we've done.

This is amazing news for you if who feel like you're living outside the Kingdom of heaven, but you want to come in. Jesus invites you in to be with him.

Now, lastly, there are some who feel like they've been born into the Kingdom that Jesus brings. Maybe that's you, you were born into a Christian household and you've been in church since you were in the womb.

### A.1 Family: Crazy

To anyone who feels like Christianity has been theirs since birth, Jesus leaves you with a strong warning...No one is born into it—no one is in by family association.

Well, we pick up the storyline of Jesus' family coming to take him away again in verse 31. It says they've arrived. Take a look at verse 31...

text: Mark 3.31 - Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him.

It says that Jesus mother and his brothers have arrived. And you imagine Jesus is about to get the middle name treatment from his mother. You know what I'm talking about, it's the most terrifying thing a mother can do to her child—use the full name. Kenneth Franklin Lippold. Most of the time, that's all the punishment you need.

Well, it seems that that's the kind of intensity Jesus' family has arrived with. But Jesus response is strange if not unsettling. Someone comes to tell Jesus that his family has arrived, then in verse 33 he says this...

text: Mark 3.33-34 - **33** 'Who are my mother and my brothers?' he asked. **34** Then he looked at those seated in a circle round him and said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers!

"No, Jesus, out there, standing at the door are your mother and brothers—they're your family!"

What's Jesus saying here? Is he saying that he's rejecting his own family, his own mother and brothers for his friends? Well, I don't think so.

Remember we said at the beginning that perhaps they reason you might find yourself frustrated with Jesus is that he won't follow you? That's how his mother and brothers must have felt. They came to lead him away, they came to make *him* a follower. Verse 35...

text: Mark 3.35 - Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother.'

Jesus must have looked around him as he said this and when he did he saw one man who, mastered by fear, would swear in Jesus' darkest hour, when Jesus needed a friend the most, that he didn't know him. He saw two more, who though closer to him than the rest, would completely misunderstand him. He saw one more who would severely doubt the truth about his resurrection. And all of them like Peter, would run and hide in the last few hours of his life.

But he saw in these same men, those who would follow him in obedience to their deaths for the sake of this new kingdom of heaven.

So, when Jesus says this, he's not rejecting his family, he's making a statement about his kingdom. The new Kingdom Jesus brings is defined by calling and obedience, not birth or knowledge.

And by the way, Mary and his brother James eventually do come to follow Jesus.

Listen, as long as you try and make Jesus follow you, you'll be frustrated by him. He alone is the authoritative author of creation. He is the rightful king. He is the only one worth following.

And it's those who come to follow him, those who accept his calling to come up the mountain to be with him and to go out in obedience to him, it's those who receive the most joy in this life and in the life to come. Not a joy that comes from the most comfortable life, not a joy that comes from the easiest life.

But a deeper joy that comes from having all your sins forgiven, all your chains removed, all your burdens lifted.

Won't you come to him? He is calling.