

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

717 North Stapley Drive, Mesa, AZ 85203 Phone: (480) 833-7500

Series:	Mark		Pastor/Teacher
Text	Mark 3:7-19		Mason Depew
Date:	September 13, 2026		

THE CROWD AND THE TWELVE

After his confrontations with the Pharisees and their disciples over fasting and the Sabbath, Jesus's popularity is growing dramatically. But how many of these people will truly "get" his message, and how will he ensure his teaching lives on beyond his personal ministry on earth? Mark presents the Twelve Disciples to us as the answer to these questions.

1. 3:7-12 | We can see clearly that Jesus was still "controlling the narrative" about his mission and avoiding direct confrontations at this stage in his ministry.
 - a. Retreating to the sea of Galilee (v. 7) and a mountain (v. 13) show he is not seeking to challenge the Pharisees or Herodians yet, even though their people are seeking him out. If he were to directly enter one of their major cities, it would be much more provocative.
 - b. Note that now not only Jews but also Edomites ("Idumea" is Edom, and Herod's ancestral homeland) and even people from Tyre and Sidon are interested in Jesus (v. 8). Even the gentiles are taking notice now!
 - c. The word for "illnesses" here in Mark 3:10 is stronger in Greek than it sounds in English. It is often translated "afflictions" or "torments," suggesting a more like-term, chronic illness, like the woman with the perpetual flow of blood in Mark 5:29 and 34.
 - d. The demons, as before (1:24), immediately surrender to him while declaring his divine identity, which Christ once again suppresses (3:12).
 - e. The fact that this multitude includes so many foreigners, as well as demon-possessed people, emphasizes that this crowd's loyalty and level of understanding is very unclear. How much of the Old Testament's prophecies about the Messiah do they know? How much do they care? Do they just want their earthly lives improved, or do they see that their deepest problem is that God's Law condemns their sin?
2. 3:13-19 | At this moment when the crowds have become almost unbelievably huge and unwieldy, Mark focuses on the Twelve. We have already seen Jesus call several of them (1:16-20; 2:13-17), but Mark here confirms that by this point the special symbolic number of twelve was complete.
 - a. The number of twelve is symbolic because Jacob/Israel had twelve sons, and his family was the foundation of the Hebrew nation. If you want to be nitpicky Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, were both treated as tribes as well,¹ bringing the number up to thirteen, but then the Levites were never given an inheritance of land, so there are still

¹ "And now your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, are mine; Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine, as Reuben and Simeon are. And the children that you fathered after them shall be yours. They shall be called by the name of their brothers in their inheritance." - Genesis 48:5-6

only twelve “landed” tribes, even when you count Joseph’s sons. In any case, Scripture primarily focuses on the twelve literal sons of Jacob, and treats Ephraim and Manasseh as a sort of two-in-one tribe.²

- i. The Gospel-writers do not ordinarily count how many people were around Jesus at any one time (except in his famous feedings of four and five thousand, to emphasize just how many people he fed in those cases), so pointing out this number of twelve is definitely deliberate.
 - ii. The number twelve suggests continuity with the Old Testament, because Jesus will begin building his kingdom among the Jews, descendants of ancient Israel. You can see how the twelve tribes and twelve apostles are held up as parallel representatives of their people in Revelation, for example.³ Each set of twelve are like the seeds of the rest of their people.
- b. The mission of the New Twelve, however, is a significant change from the “Twelve” of the Old Testament. The original Twelve, in Genesis, were supposed to be fruitful and multiply themselves into a great nation serving the God who had made promises to their ancestors.
- i. The New Testament Twelve are primarily called “disciples” in the Gospels, because at this stage they are still focused on learning at Jesus’s feet.⁴ Mark already tells us here what he is preparing them for, however, in verse 14: to send them out on their own, without him being bodily present. The verb Mark uses here for their “sending,” which is the root of the word, “apostle,” foreshadows their key role after his ascension.
 - ii. What will he send them to do? He gives them authority to cast out demons in verse 15, but that is not their primary purpose. The demons they will be casting out are for the sake of authenticating their true mission, which is to preach the good news of Christ’s kingdom.⁵ In fact, you can see how the demons recognize the Apostles

² The priests were supposed to wear twelve stones, representing all the tribes of Israel: “There shall be twelve stones with their names according to the names of the sons of Israel. They shall be like signets, each engraved with its name, for the twelve tribes.” - Exodus 28:21. Also, the priests were supposed to stack twelve loaves of bread in the Tabernacle, representing a food offering from each of the tribes every Sabbath: “You shall take fine flour and bake twelve loaves from it; two tenths of an ephah shall be in each loaf. And you shall set them in two piles, six in a pile, on the table of pure gold before the LORD. And you shall put pure frankincense on each pile, that it may go with the bread as a memorial portion as a food offering to the LORD. Every Sabbath day Aaron shall arrange it before the LORD regularly; it is from the people of Israel as a covenant forever. And it shall be for Aaron and his sons, and they shall eat it in a holy place, since it is for him a most holy portion out of the LORD’s food offerings, a perpetual due.” - Leviticus 24:5-9

³ The clearest reference is the description of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21, “It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates **the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel** were inscribed—on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were **the twelve names of the twelve apostles** of the Lamb.” - Revelation 21:12-14. There are also, however, the twenty-four elders in Revelation 4:4, which of course is 12 x 2, for the Old and New Testament peoples combined: “Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads.”

⁴ There are some cases in each of the Gospels, except John, where the author does call the Twelve “Apostles,” but these are far outnumbered by the times they are called “Disciples” or simply “The Twelve.”

⁵ “This miraculous power is not to be regarded as an independent and co-ordinate function of the apostolic office, but as subsidiary to the main one of preaching and proclaiming the Messiah’s kingdom, both as an attestation of their message, and as a means of arousing attention and securing its reception. As the twelve were to relieve their Master in his work of proclamation, so they were to be provided with the same means of authenticating and enforcing it which he employed himself, but only as his delegates or representatives, who spoke and acted always in his name, and by his sovereign authority.” - J.A. Alexander, *Mark*, 65-66.

in Acts just like Christ in the Gospels.⁶ But, importantly, this is not an authority that just anyone can use. It is delegated by Christ specially to the Apostles, and is not to be presumptuously claimed by others.⁷

1. The point this should really bring us back to is realizing just how perfect and complete Christ's authority is. The Apostles do not have this authority in themselves, but Christ can give it freely to whomever he wills, for his own glory. This, again, is just further proof that he transcends any other prophet or miracle-worker, as the very Son of God Incarnate.
 2. Therefore, if you have an encounter with what you think or suspect may be overt demonic influence, you should *not* presume it will be as easy to cast out as the Apostles could. There is no exact Reformed formula for how to deal with this; we do not believe there is any ritual or professional exorcist to handle these kinds of situations. But our theology does not leave us without any useful answers.⁸ Instead of speaking to or confronting this spirit directly, you should turn to the Lord with prayer and even fasting. He is the one they fear; not you.
 3. Remember that if you belong to Jesus Christ, the worst a demon can do to you is harass, not overpower. This is because, as the Heidelberg Catechism's famous first answer says, "He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from **all the power of the devil**."⁹
- iii. This authority to cast out demons is a reminder that the focus of God's kingdom has shifted from earthly to spiritual warfare. In the Old Testament, the Holy War was against pagans polluting the promised land. In the New Testament, the Holy War is against the "prince of this world" who has been invisibly polluting this whole creation since the Fall.¹⁰

⁶ For example, the slave girl with a spirit who went before Paul like a self-appointed herald: "As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. She followed Paul and us, crying out, 'These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.' And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, 'I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.' And it came out that very hour."

⁷ The story of the Sons of Sceva is particularly instructive in this regard, because the demons know Jesus and recognize the Apostle Paul, but refuse to obey just anyone who uses their names: "Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, 'I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims.' Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. But the evil spirit answered them, 'Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?' And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded." - Acts 19:13-16

⁸ I highly recommend reading the story of the Stoddard missionary family in Germany. They experienced a terrifying range of threats against their ministry, including their toddler dreaming x-rated nightmares that there was just no natural explanation for. The only solution they found was prayer: Search for "Dealing with Demons," on *The Gospel Coalition*, Dec. 9, 2013. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/dealing-with-demons/>

⁹ After all, what is the shield that extinguishes the darts of the Evil One? "In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one." - Ephesians 6:16. This does not mean that the strength of your faith is what does the job, but because this shield has been given to you by *the one you have faith in*, you will endure.

¹⁰ "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world." - 1 Peter 5:8-9. Paul makes the contrast even sharper in Ephesians 6:12, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."

- c. The key to the Apostles' mission is their *message*. Their mission is not, as some think, primarily to administer the Church and "call the shots," so to speak.¹¹ Their mission, instead, was to preach Christ's coming to everyone they could.
- i. This is clear from the Great Commission, through all the sermons in Acts, and even in the way the Apostles Peter,¹² Paul,¹³ and John¹⁴ each describe their own work.
 - ii. Notice in several of the above passages how the Apostles focus on the fact that they were *eyewitnesses*. Their arguments did not rest on sophistry, numerology, or any tantalizing, "secret" knowledge, but on being eyewitnesses to the public events of Jesus's life. It was all out in the open, as a matter of public record, and the Apostles simply kept pointing back to it as the core of their message.
 - iii. At the time when Jesus called them, this message was not fully known by the Twelve, and indeed it could not be, because its most important events had not yet happened! We get a reminder of that in Mark's ominous foreshadowing about Judas in 3:19.¹⁵ Jesus's atoning death and resurrection would be at the heart of their apostolic preaching, but at the time of their calling it was still on the horizon.
 - iv. This means that the test of whether a church is "apostolic," as the Creed says, is not whether that church can trace a 2,000 year lineage of ordinations back to the Apostles, but whether that church carries the apostolic *message*. Does a church faithfully preach Christ and him crucified? Then it is an apostolic church, the legitimate offspring of Peter, John, Paul, and the rest. If a church can show a succession of ordinations back to Peter but *does not* preach the apostolic message, however, then it is not apostolic at all, no matter how loudly it might say so.¹⁶ There is no indication anywhere in Scripture that the apostles were supposed to ordain their own successors with equivalent authority to their own. This would not even make sense, since they could not simply make new eyewitnesses once Christ had ascended!

¹¹ Note that in Acts 15:22, the Apostles make their decision *together with the Elders* at the Jerusalem Council: "Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas." With respect to decisions like this, the apostles did not outrank the elders of the churches. It is with respect to their *teaching* that the Apostles had special authority.

¹² "For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,' we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain." - 2 Peter 1:16-18

¹³ "Last of all, as to one untimely born, he [Christ] appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed." - 1 Corinthians 15:8-11

¹⁴ "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word[fn] of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ." - 1 John 1:1-3

¹⁵ "...and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him."

¹⁶ Remember that the Galatian church was founded by the Apostle Paul, and yet it so quickly began to entertain a false gospel that Paul warned them in the strongest possible terms: "O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified" (Galatians 3:1). They *were* an apostolic church, undoubtedly, but they were on the verge of losing that apostolic heritage if they abandoned Paul's teaching. Note that this is also the only church that Paul does not warmly greet with confidence that they are a true church, unlike even the Corinthians!

- v. The Church's mission today is to preserve and proclaim the message that the Twelve laid down and defined in their writings, which are the canon of the New Testament Scriptures. These twenty-seven books *are* the apostolic legacy that we continue to spread to every tribe, tongue, and nation as Christ builds his Church.¹⁷
3. It is the Holy Spirit wielding the Word, written by God through the Apostles, that makes the Church ultimately indestructible. Though she is assailed by many persecutors, false teachers, and hypocrites in this world, the Word of God must triumph. As Luther famously wrote,

“That Word above all earthly powers
no thanks to them abideth;
the Spirit and the gifts are ours
through him who with us sideth.
Let goods and kindred go,
this mortal life also;
the body they may kill:
God's truth abideth still;
his kingdom is forever!”

¹⁷ Note that in both of his letters to Timothy, the Apostle Paul reminds him to carefully guard “the deposit” entrusted to him: “By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you” (2 Timothy 1:14) and “O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called ‘knowledge,’” (1 Timothy 6:20). In both contexts, Paul contrasts this “deposit” with false teaching, making it clear that this deposit is the Gospel of Christ crucified that he had preached to the Corinthians, the Galatians, and everyone else.