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THE TRUE PURPOSE¹

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The last time we looked at Mark 3, we talked about how people came to Jesus but came with their own agendas and their own purposes. They didn't really want to hear what the Master had to say; instead, they wanted to use the Master for their own purposes. Even today, we find this to be the case inside of churches everywhere; maybe even within this church. It's up to us to search our hearts and see why we've come to church.

Now, if we have our own purposes, our own agendas, in coming to Christ, what is His purpose in coming to us? Mark has already told us; but Mark is showing us the contrast here in chapter three between Jesus' purpose and the purposes of other people. The people want Jesus to take care of their external health problems, which are temporary; but Jesus came to heal our internal sin problem, which is eternal. But they didn't want to hear about that!

But there is another group coming to Jesus. I find this part of the record very interesting. Look with me at Mark 3:11-12:

¹¹ *And unclean spirits, when they saw him, fell down before him, and cried, saying, Thou art the Son of God.*

¹² *And he straitly charged them that they should not make him known.*

Does that seem just a little odd to you? Here are these demons coming to Jesus and worshipping Him. What is the deal here? And why doesn't Jesus accept their worship since what they are saying is true?

Here's what I think: I think (and I can't possibly prove this) that these demons were playing a game. I don't think they were sincere in what they were saying. You might remember the Bible's teaching about demons, in that they once were angels who were deceived by Lucifer into rebelling against God and so were expelled from Heaven. These demons had their chance to worship Christ and serve Him forever, but they chose otherwise. It may be that some of them sought redemption; knowing that God is merciful, perhaps some of these demons were trying to get back into His good graces. But I don't think that is the case. I strongly suspect that they were involved in a plot to deceive the people into thinking that Jesus was the Lord, not of heaven, but of the demons. I know I've used a little speculation, but there is one thing that we can be absolutely sure of: these demons were speaking the truth, but they were not doing it to advance the cause of Christ.

To me, this would explain Jesus' reaction to them: He told them to stop! He put them under the strictest orders to stop talking about Him and calling Him the Son of God. In the first place, they had forfeited the privilege of speaking to Him as the Son of God. In the second place, He knows what they're up to and He knows that they are not sincere. They're playing a game, and He will have none of that!

After just a few verses, you'll see some evidence of what I've just suggested. For now, let's turn our attention to Jesus' true purpose. Would you look at Mark 3:13-19a:

¹ This sermon is unedited.

¹³ *And he goeth up into a mountain, and calleth unto him whom he would: and they came unto him.*

¹⁴ *And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach,*

¹⁵ *And to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils:*

¹⁶ *And Simon he surnamed Peter;*

¹⁷ *And James the son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James; and he surnamed them Boanerges, which is, The 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 Canaanite,*

¹⁹ *And Judas Iscariot, which also betrayed him:*

This is Mark's "to-the-point" version of Jesus' calling His twelve disciples. Mark doesn't give us the background information of these men; he just gives us a list with a very few tidbits about a few of these guys.

But notice the purpose for which they are called: they are called to be with Christ and then to preach. They are to get to know Jesus and then carry Jesus' message to places far and wide so that many people will hear Jesus' message. We see also that Jesus gave them the power to heal sicknesses and cast out demons in order to affirm that their message is, in fact, from God. After all, haven't we already seen in Mark that Jesus healed people and cast out demons in order to show that His message was true? But his main purpose was never to simply deal with our health issues, because no matter how much we're healed, at some point we're going to die due to the curse of sin in this world. Jesus came to preach and break that curse of sin for eternity. So now he's commissioned these twelve men to go out with His same message, and, acting under His authority, affirm that message by healing and casting out demons.

I won't spend a long time on this list, but I will point to Mark's little tidbits. Notice that he lists Peter first; Peter, you may recall, is Mark's uncle. His given name was Simon, but Jesus called Him Peter, "the Rock." You know, Peter didn't always live up to that name, did He? But Jesus gave him that name anyway. Jesus gave him a name that fit his potential. For all of Peter's fits and starts, for all of his shortcomings, Jesus saw a man who would become more than he currently was. *Isn't that great? He loves you the same way. He loves you as you are, but He won't leave you as you are.*

The next tidbit here I think shows our Lord's sense of humor. He called James and John "Boanerges," the "Sons of Thunder." James and John in these early days tended to get upset easily. They would fly off the handle. One time they even asked Jesus to let them call down destruction on a city because the people there were so hard-hearted. Jesus called them the "Sons of Thunder" for a good reason! Yet we find that, over time, these men developed and matured into great lovers of God and of mankind. I'll bet that when John was an old man, the members of his church in Ephesus had a hard time believing that John was such a hasty man in his youth. The elderly John developed a reputation as being a sweet, loving, godly man. And James became the first leader in the church at Jerusalem, respected and well-reasoned. Jesus saw the potential in these men. *Isn't that great? He loves you the same way. He loves you as you are, but He won't leave you as you are.*

The last tidbit is about Judas. Mark simply tells us what Judas will do at the end of the story: Judas

betrayed Jesus. But at this point, we're just getting started. Judas hasn't betrayed anybody. He's doing the same thing the other disciples are doing. In fact, we never hear that Judas is left out. Does it say in this part that all the disciples preached, healed, and cast out demons *except* Judas? No! Apparently he was given the same commission and authority as the rest. He was able to do what all the others could do. He could preach, he could heal, he could cast out demons. He seemed to be the real deal, but there's a problem. Judas isn't really listening to or believing the message in his own heart. He's so close to the truth, and yet...he has his own agenda. He wants something for himself rather than really trusting Jesus by faith. We will find out later that he's placing his trust in money rather than in Jesus; but notice that Jesus gives him the same chance that He gives to the others. Judas could have chosen what was right, but he didn't. Jesus gives us all the chance, the opportunity, to place our trust in Him. Some people, like Judas, come close but never quite give up their trust in something else that holds their love. That something might be money, it might be pleasure and past time, it might be fame or popularity, it might simply be our own pride and self-reliance.

These are the twelve whom Jesus selected. It is evident in the contrast between this paragraph and the previous one that Mark wants us to understand that the witness Jesus wanted was not pretentious claims and impressive titles from demons, true as they might have been, but rather he wanted the witness of changed lives and empowered words, of men who had been with him and whose lives were different as a result, who were sent out to say what they had heard and learned, and who therefore had power to speak authoritatively—even over the demons. This was the witness he chose. It is the witness he chooses yet today.²

² Ray Stedman, "False Forces." October 27, 1974. Available at <http://www.raystedman.org/new-testament/mark/false-forces>.