



Speaker:
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The Discrimination of Christ

Series: The Gospel of Mark • 10 of 10

7/8/2020 (WED) | Bible: Mark 3:7-19

Today we are on Mark's third chapter. And I'd like us to consider verses 7 to 19.

So what have we seen so far? We've witnessed a series of miraculous healings by Jesus. He's also cast out demons by his great power. He's preached the message of the kingdom; that is, he's been explaining to the Jews the true nature of God's kingdom as opposed to the one they envisaged. While their hope was a king who would crush the occupying forces of Rome and exalt the Jews as rulers over mankind, Jesus presented himself as the king who would set up a spiritual kingdom that would last forever, made up of people from all nations.

During the course of this ministry of Jesus, there were various conversations with Jewish religious leaders. We might expect that those who were most familiar with the scriptures, those who were most highly trained in theology, would immediately recognise who Jesus was. They would see in him the fulfilment of all Old Testament prophecy, and herald him as the promised messiah. Instead, they criticized him. They questioned his claims. They undermined his acts of kindness. And their resentment grew. And already, at this early stage in Mark's Gospel, the Jews are conspiring to murder Jesus.

Our passage today begins with Jesus going with his disciples to the coast. But the disciples had not reckoned on the magnitude of Jesus' popularity. A multitude gathered. Not just people from the local town. Not even people from Galilee alone. These people had come from all across the land. And from the examples that Mark gives us, we can see that some people had travelled over 100 miles just to hear Jesus and see his marvellous works.

Wisely, Jesus instructs the disciples to get a boat ready. He sees the growing crowd, and quite responsibly prepares measures to escape the crowds in case they crush him.

As for verses 7 to 12, I only wish to make a couple of points by way of reminder. Hopefully, you were persuaded with me that the healings and exorcisms that Jesus carried out had two purposes. The lesser one was to express kindness. These were raw acts of mercy that brought great joy and transformed the lives of entire families. But these acts of compassion were without any conditions attached. Many accepted Jesus' compassionate intervention without any true repentance towards God. Multitudes who were healed by Jesus, we noted, would by this same Jesus be condemned at the judgement. These merciful acts of Jesus were then of temporary benefit only.

So what was the greater purpose of the miracles? **It was to picture for us the infinitely greater act of compassion whereby God forgives men's sins.** God had been saving people for 4000 years. Salvation was not something new. But Jesus was ushering in a new gospel age whereby men could enjoy liberty unknown by those under the Mosaic Law. An age of

clearer revelation from God in the form of a completed canon of scripture. An age where God's salvation was extended across the globe.

Going back to our reading today, we see in verses 13 to 19 the calling of the apostles. I want to make just a few comments about this section before I focus on just one aspect of it which stood out for me.

Note that Jesus went up a mountain again. Mountains do have significance in scripture. They're used figuratively, to represent powerful government for example. And they're also the scene for numerous interesting and significant events. We might think of the receiving of the law by Moses, or the great showdown between Elijah and the false prophets, both events taking place on mountains.

Jesus resorted to the seclusion of mountains from time to time. The transfiguration took place upper mountain, for example. And here, Jesus went up the mountain to pray. Afterwards, he summoned his disciples to come to him. How many disciples there were I can't tell. But it was from this crowd that Jesus chose the Twelve. And in order that God's purposes might be carried out, Jesus deliberately chose as one of the Twelve a *traitor*. One who was foreordained to betray him. One whose betrayal would lead to a series of events culminating in the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ. And though the world mocked, and although the heavenly realm was filled with shouts of victory from multitudes of rebel angels, God's grand scheme was unfolding right under their noses. God, you might say, had the last laugh. Because it was in the death of his own son that untold millions would be redeemed forever more.

In our Old Testament, we're accustomed to looking at the meanings of people's names. Back then, the naming of children was a much more serious matter than it is today. It was almost expected that a name given to a child would reflect either the circumstances in which they were born or by way of a prophecy of how the child's life would pan out.

But it seems that this tradition didn't have the same importance in Jesus day. Certainly, Jesus's name was given very deliberately. His name described both who he was and what his mission was. And when we look at the twelve apostles here we see some with, if you like, "serious" names. Simon's name meant "The Rock", signifying steadfastness in the faith. Jesus nicknamed a couple of others "The Sons of Thunder". The name of yet another, Matthew, spoke of God's Grace. But then again, the name *James* comes from *Jacob* which means "deceiver" or "supplanter". And another apostle, Philip, has a name which means "a lover of horses". So if we wish to make the names of the Twelve a matter of Bible study, we should proceed with caution.

I only now want to highlight the purpose for the calling of the Twelve. They were to reproduce many of the miracles that Jesus had performed. They would be given the power to heal diseases with just a word or a touch of the hand. In Christ's name, they would command demons to leave their hosts.

But as with the ministry of Jesus himself, **the most important aspect of the apostles' ministry was preaching**. And I say this because it is through the preaching of the gospel that men are saved eternally. Miracles may impress men. The people of our day constantly demand that God reveal himself through miracles. The visual spectacle of a miracle is a powerful draw to the carnal man.

Yet the greatest miracle of all is the salvation of a soul. It is largely unseen. The world is not impressed by it. But the quiet, internal conversion of a soul from sinner to saved is the far greater miracle. Friends, when the day came that you finally admitted defeat and waved the white flag of surrender to God, there was rejoicing in the heavens. Just for you! There was celebration throughout the ranks of the holy angels. Just for you! That is the magnitude of the miracle that is conversion.

I said I wanted to focus on just one aspect of this whole passage. And the phrase which made an impression on me is found in verse 13. It says there that Jesus “calletth unto him whom he would”. We would say today “he called to himself whoever he wanted”. **It was his choice, not theirs.** And in this small phrase is contained the truth that **many are called but few are chosen.** Many are called. But not many are chosen.

I'm always urging Christians to be extremely careful about any information or perspective that they hear from the world. A child who makes a Christian profession should be told to be cautious about what they hear in school. Young Christians should be on their guard when being taught in colleges and universities. Adult Christians should exercise the utmost discernment when listening to the news or watching chat shows. The world speaks to the church through a wide variety of media. And believers must understand that the world's perspective is distorted. I could honestly spend all day reading off example after example of how the world preaches a faulty morality. Obviously, I can't do that. I'd only remind you of the danger of joining in with the world's good causes.

I say all this only to use the example of *discrimination*. We hear the word in the media every day. To the world, discrimination is a toxic word. To discriminate against people is believed to be one of the worst crimes humans can commit. Yet I want to remind you today that **God certainly DOES discriminate.** And his is a type of discrimination that the world would class as unfair. It horrifies them that God would welcome into his family those who have committed terrible crimes while rejecting those who have, in the world's eyes, behaved themselves.

I want to look at three examples now of how Jesus Christ discriminates, and show that his choice is based on his sovereign will alone and is therefore not to be questioned.

Firstly, we see Christ's discrimination in his choice of who to heal. All the diseases he cured, and all the demons he cast out were performed no more than 100 miles from where he was born. The vast number of people around the world with diseases didn't have a chance. Europe...the Americas...Africa...Asia...the Far East...the frozen regions of this world...were *ignored* by Jesus. In other words, he deliberately discriminated in favour of one ethnic group and discriminated against all others. But this was part of his purpose. God had determined to reveal himself firstly to a chosen race, *and that race was not one ounce better than any other nation.*

Many in the world had diseases, but few were chosen for healing. It was God's choice.

Secondly, we see Christ's discrimination in his choice of the Twelve. Jesus had perhaps scores or even hundreds of disciples to choose from. But he chose this bunch. And let's be clear again that his choice was not because this twelve were any better than anyone else. They were models of neither faith, nor knowledge, nor spiritual insight. On the contrary, he chose a bunch of nobodies. Other disciples who were not chosen may well have wondered

why on earth Jesus picked the ones he did. It's a marvel of God's ways that his choice of instruments to perform his will is always surprising. So the discrimination that Jesus exercises makes no sense to us. He calls whoever he wants to. Listen to what it says in John 15:16. "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you..."

Many people followed Jesus, but few were chosen for apostleship. It was God's choice.

Thirdly, we see Christ's discrimination in his choice of who to save. He saves some and not others. In time, he reaches his chosen ones with the gospel message. And to *them alone* he gives something extra. He grants to them the light of understanding. He gives them, *and them alone*, a vision of his holiness. He enables them, *not others*, to come to God with a heart of true repentance and faith.

You will hear some strange ideas about this discrimination. Within the professing church, some are as offended as the world by this idea of discrimination by God. They cry that it's unfair. One view says that God looked into the future to see who would turn to him, and it was these that he called "his elect". Is that what we think? That we have powerful free-will that can choose God if we want? According to that view, people who repent must be morally better than those who don't. They must be less rebellious than others. They must have a spiritual insight that is not common to men. **And all this paints a picture of man initiating salvation and God finishing it off.** Listen to this in John 6:44. "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him..."

Jesus says that no one is able to trust in him unless the father begins a work in them. And even all that follows on from this is of God. We only continue to follow God because of a second-by-second work of God in us. It's **all** of him.

No. God didn't choose men based on his peering into the future to see how they would respond to the gospel. IN HIS NATURAL STATE, MAN WOULD NEVER CHOOSE GOD. MAN BY NATURE HATES GOD. Most would KILL him if they could. Rather, the Bible teaches that God elected, or chose, a fixed number of people to save, and he did all this before the world existed.

Another essential part of Salvation that the Arminian types misunderstand is the *work of the Spirit*. Having elected someone to salvation, God then sends his Spirit into their hearts to regenerate them. The natural man is spiritually dead, and it takes a work of the Holy Spirit to make them alive. **If God does not send his Spirit in this way, a man will never be saved.** That can only lead to one conclusion: GOD WILL SAVE WHO HE WANTS TO SAVE. HAD HE WANTED TO SAVE ALL, HE WOULD SEND HIS SPIRIT INTO ALL THE HEARTS OF ALL MEN. But he withholds his Spirit from most. **The very means which man needs in order to become aware of his sinfulness, repent and places his trust in Jesus Christ is not given.** You can read in 2 Timothy 2:25, "In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves, **if God peradventure will give them repentance** to the acknowledging of the truth". Repentance is *given*. It is given by *God*. And the apostle here indicates that God may or may not give repentance to people. It all depends on election.

This gospel of God's is to be preached always and everywhere. We, the ambassadors of God, are to tell people about Jesus Christ. We are to warn them that they need to repent. And in doing this, we don't discriminate. It's therefore not just to be preached always and everywhere, but also to *everyone*. But how God *uses* our witnessing is based on the highest

degree of discrimination. Out of the tens of millions of people who have heard the gospel, only a handful belong to that elect list. Jesus himself says that the way to eternal life is narrow and not many find themselves on that road.

- Many in the world of Jesus' day were diseased, but few were chosen for healing
- Many people followed Jesus, but few were chosen for apostleship
- And a great many people hear the gospel, but few are chosen for salvation. Truly many are called but few are chosen.

Why are only a few chosen? The world will wonder how God's purpose can be thought of as good if the majority of the human race end up in outer darkness. I'm not the best person to answer this question. Whether you are a believer or not, you will get to see God one day at the judgement, and you can ask him yourself if you dare.

I'd only offer two points. One is just my own thought, the other is a principal from scripture. My first point addresses the question of why there are so few that be saved. Well, you might like to see in the small number of those saved *just how special they are*. Precious gems are in demand because they are not only beautiful but *rare*. We're taken aback by the beauty of the stars in the heavens. But the only way we can appreciate them is because they have been placed on a *mostly black canvas*.

My second point addresses the question of *why any are lost at all*. The answer to this is in the Bible itself. Romans 9:21-22 says, "Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction..?"

Had God purposed to save the whole human race, we could see his grace, yes. **But the apostle here implies that God wished to display both his grace and his anger against sin.** Ultimately, mankind is just clay in the hands of the Great Potter. We may not be happy that there exists a lake of fire, let alone the knowledge that many of those we love will end up there. But it's not for us to question God's wisdom, which is higher than ours. No one will be punished at God's hand who did not deserve it.

Many are called, but few are chosen to become vessels to showcase God's mercy.

In closing, I'd like us to see all this from a slightly different perspective. There may be few that are chosen, but this few still amounts to what the Bible describes as a great multitude that it is impossible to even number. We're talking millions and millions and millions of people.

And they're a mixed bag. God has chosen people from all over the world. The makeup of his church knows no geographical boundaries. It is made up of people from many different ethnicities. John attempts to describe the diversity which makes up the church of God. In the book of the Revelation 5:9 we read, "And they sung a new song, saying, 'Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood **out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation**'".

The body of Christ comprises black and white, rich and poor, male and female, young and old. And on that resurrection morning, we shall realise fully how unimportant all those types of differences were. To that end, the church preaches the gospel to all. The church loves all.

The world shouts about discrimination, then itself discriminates against people who it dislikes. The world talks much about “love not hate”, yet it continually shows just how hateful it can be in its opposition to those who disagree with its viewpoint. By God's grace, the church is able to exercise a love that the world cannot believe! A love that will take the saving message of the gospel to all. A love that will continue even under persecution—even towards those that hate us.

We leave discrimination to God. He has both the knowledge and the authority to allow him to discriminate justly. Many are called by him, but few are chosen by him. We can only praise him over and over that, for whatever reason, he chose us.

Amen.