

## The King Is Calling

*Mark: The Gospel of the Kingdom*

Mark 3:7-19

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Despite the craziness of our weather, tomorrow actually marks the beginning of spring, and with it begins the season of weddings. And generally, even though we are long time Americans, practicing American-style weddings, we still have this old saying which is very English. I think you know it. Something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue—and a sixpence, a silver sixpence, in her shoe. And we use that, but I don't know if any—very many people, actually, know what any of that means.

It means something very interesting, and it's this. The idea of something old is looking back and building something which has continuity, continuity from the past into the present. Something new, of course, is fairly easy to understand. It's the marking of a new beginning. The idea of something borrowed is of course the blessing generally given from someone who is in relationship to you, who themselves have experienced what you're about to begin. And then something blue is this idea of what you're entering into is to be kept pure and faithful. And a silver sixpence in her shoe is the hope for prosperity in the future. Now all analogies and metaphors break down in the end, but I do think of this passage in very much that way. There is something old. There is something very new. There's something borrowed. And there is something which represents purity and a hope for the future.

Jesus has now been ministering—he's been ministering in the city, in the towns, and going to synagogues. And so what he's been doing is he's been active among the people. Now Jesus in this passage goes back out into the wilderness, as it were. And when he does—very much like his first trip into the wilderness—it invites attack, the attack of the evil one. Here we see and will hear of the demonic spirits who want to try again to name him, thereby try to tame him. But then Jesus does something old and then also something new and it's also a promise for the future.

Before I go any further, I want to say that the way in which to view this passage is first we have to look at what it meant specifically for the time in which it took place and for those that he called to himself. That's the first layer. So there's something unique that is happening that only happens here with the twelve. But there is a second layer of meaning which applies to all of us who are called to follow Jesus. So first we're going to look at the first layer of what it meant uniquely for this group and for this time, but then as a second layer what it means for all of us. The king is indeed calling. Hear now God's word. Mark 3:7-19.

<sup>7</sup> Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the sea, and a great crowd followed, from Galilee and Judea <sup>8</sup> and Jerusalem and Idumea and from beyond the Jordan and from around Tyre and Sidon. When the great crowd heard all that he was doing, they came to him. <sup>9</sup> And he told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, lest they crush him, <sup>10</sup> for he had healed many, so that all who had diseases pressed around him to touch him. <sup>11</sup> And whenever the

unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, “You are the Son of God.”<sup>12</sup> And he strictly ordered them not to make him known.

<sup>13</sup> And he went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him. <sup>14</sup> And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach <sup>15</sup> and have authority to cast out demons. <sup>16</sup> He appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); <sup>17</sup> James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder); <sup>18</sup> Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Zealot, <sup>19</sup> and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. [ESV]

This is the word of the Lord. (Thanks be to God.) Will you pray with me. Now we ask you, O Lord, to help us to see the calling of the king—what it meant for the twelve and what it means for us. That we might gain a glimpse of what you were doing and what you are still doing. That we would hear this calling. That we would hear the calling of our heavenly Father through your Son, Jesus Christ—whom the scriptures call the bridegroom—calling a people to himself, that would be marked, as every wedding would be marked, with a wedding feast. We today, Lord, celebrate that sacrament which Jesus told us to continue. It is the Lord's Supper, which would be—is—a remembrance and a celebration of what Jesus has done on our behalf, but it is also looking forward to that great wedding feast, the Supper of the Lamb, when he returns. So Lord, this is very much like a wedding: Jesus calling to himself a people who would be his bride, united with him to be sent out, but looking toward that day when Jesus will return as the great bridegroom of heaven, to make a people glorious, complete for himself. Lord, help us to see that the King is calling us. We pray that by your Spirit you will help us to respond. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

So in this passage I will say that I want to encourage you to. . . And in much of the Gospels themselves, and not just Mark, it is what we are called to do, and that is, Biblical theology. There are different schools of theology. There's historical theology, looking at how theology has been developed through the history of the church. There's systematic theology which looks at the teaching of Jesus and the New Testament and the Old Testament, and looks at it through the lens of the different doctrines, the different principles, which we are to believe concerning who God is, who we are in light of who God is, and what he has done and what he will continue to do. All of this is governed and overseen by his word, which is his authority. There is another school of theology which is indispensable to understanding who God is, and that is Biblical theology, looking at all the scriptures from Genesis to Revelation as the unfolding—ever progressively so—of the narrative of what God is doing throughout history from Genesis to Revelation. You've heard us refer to it as we've looked throughout this year from September forward, that biblical theology is of creation, fall into sin, God's promise of redemption, and restoration. So you have creation, fall, redemption, restoration.

And as we look at the Gospel of Mark, you will see this morning—in these relatively few verses—you will recognize what are biblical theological categories. What Jesus is doing is he's connecting us to something old, while at the same time establishing something new, and he's

looking forward to something which will happen in the future. He's calling us, and Mark is encouraging us and calling us, to put on, if you will, our biblical theological hats, and understanding what God is doing in this passage is something that is connected—which is very old, something new, and something he's going to do. So looking at it from that perspective you will see that the calling of the King here, you'll see the **Calling**, the **Presence** and the **Sending**. The **Calling**, the **Presence**, and the **Sending**.

First you see the **Calling**. What you see here is that Jesus is again being pressed on all sides. We're meant to see the striking contrast of those who are following him as his disciples, those who've heard the call, as well, as you see, those who are coming after Jesus. So there's—notice the distinction—there are some who are coming after Jesus and some who are following Jesus. Those who are coming after Jesus are coming after him because they see that he is doing something which is marvelous: healing. And they simply want some more of that healing. If they can merely touch his garment, it's good enough for them. And so you see that the text tells us that he's being crushed on all sides.

Jesus, demonstrating his humanness, is tired and needs to go to a place where he can be present, alone, with the Father. And so though they are crushing him, he now—the text tells us—he goes out. He has his disciples prepare a boat to go out into the sea. Now the sea is very much like the wilderness—again, a biblical theological category. In the Old Testament the wilderness is the desert. The wilderness is literally the wilderness or the mountains or it can also be the sea. It is a place of challenge, a place of aloneness, a place of temptation. Jesus, Mark tells us, is going back out into the wilderness. And it is in the wilderness that he's going to do something new.

But before he gets there, what is interesting is, even though there are those around him coming after him, we see again that there are those who are following him or coming after him who are filled with demonic spirits. And they are controlling the lives of those that they inhabit. But even when the demons who are possessing these people who are coming after Jesus—when they see Jesus, they bow before him. Because the demons, it seems thus far, are the ones who actually know who Jesus is. And they call him out: “You are the Son of God.” Again, as we've looked at before, this is a common theme through Mark, because when they try to name him, they're trying to tame Jesus. So his call to them is to shut up, do not speak. Because to reveal Jesus as the Son of God before its time is not a good thing. So Jesus has authority even over that. So his call to them is to be quiet. He's judging them with authority, and they are quieted.

But then he goes out with his disciples, and he appointed, [Mark] tells us, the twelve. Now this is unique for Mark. We're going to see this phrase, ‘the twelve.’ While he recognizes that discipleship is far beyond the twelve, only the disciples are ‘the twelve.’ So this will be a phrase for Mark, and this is the beginning. And what we see is, is that Jesus is calling out the twelve. Here's the something old part. Rather than digging in deep to the names, which are largely colorless—meaning while they do have meaning, that's not the point of naming them. The point [is] calling them ‘the twelve,’ which is for Mark a very old idea. Jesus is calling out the twelve as a representation of the one who's been called by God to lead his people. He does so by calling twelve representatives, just like the twelve tribes of Israel. Not that each one of the twelve represent the twelve areas, those some scholars would suggest that. But I would say

that's getting even, perhaps, digging too deep into the weeds and missing the forest for the trees. (Oh that just rhymes. So sorry. Not on purpose. So there we are.) The idea [is] that Jesus is establishing his authority, he's establishing himself as the king of Israel—though he doesn't say that. He's calling forth a people for himself, represented in these twelve disciples.

And this calling is in the midst of crushing crowds. It is in the midst of temptation, just as in the Old Testament, Israel being pushed from one side or the other. Even in the midst of slavery in Egypt, God calls forth his people, sets them Moses as their leader. Jesus is the greater Moses. Jesus is what Moses couldn't be. He is the Son of the Living God, calling forth his people represented in these twelve. And he's calling them out. That's what the 'church' means. Remember, we talked about that. The word 'church' is *ecclesia*, meaning the called out ones. What Jesus is doing is, he's calling the people to be wedded to himself. He is their God; you are my people.

So when he calls out these twelve, Mark goes to the next part, as he says why he is calling them. Mark says that he calls. And he went up to a mountain and he called those to him, "those whom he desired, and they came to him. And he appointed the twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him." What is beautiful about that is it's explaining what Jesus does when he calls his disciples. He doesn't call them first and foremost to a classroom. He doesn't call them to a text book. He doesn't call them to a list of doctrinal truths. He calls them to be in his **Presence**. And in so doing, he calls them into relationship with himself. And that is precisely what Jesus is establishing of what it looks like to be a disciple, to be one who is a follower of Jesus. First, you were called, you were invited.

And by the way, going back to the twelve disciples, there is nothing particularly interesting about them. There's nothing dynamic, there is nothing unique, there is nothing that they are called because they have particular gifts—thanks be to God. They are a group of people who are a motley crew. He invites, he calls, not based on who you are, but based on who he is and his love for them. And he calls them. And now he calls them into his presence. That is what it means to be a follower of Jesus. It's what it means to be a disciple: that is, to be in his presence.

It's a very old idea that we learn through relationship. It's the very old idea of apprenticeship. We learn by doing in relationship. He doesn't say OK, come up to me, I'm going to give you some facts, now go. No, he calls them into relationship with himself. See, we've turned discipleship on its head to mean something that it doesn't. That discipleship means you're called to Jesus to learn a lot of things about Jesus, now go and apply them to your life. No, that's what a lot of other philosophies have taught us about what discipleship is. That's not what it is. It first is being called by God, in relationship with Jesus, to be in his presence.

Well, how then are we are in his presence? We're in his presence by learning by what he says, just absorbing what he says, enjoying what he says, receiving what he says. And that is what they did. We have the word; they had Jesus. John tells us that Jesus is the word, so we have the word. And Jesus says unless I go from you, the Holy Spirit will not come to you. And we learn in the Gospel of John that the Holy Spirit will testify everything that Jesus has said, which is recorded for us. We then have the Spirit and the word, and the Spirit is the presence of the Living God. Jesus is everywhere present by his Spirit. Jesus said, "I will never leave you nor

forsake you.” How can he say that when Jesus is seated at the right hand of God the Father after the resurrection? It is because his Holy Spirit is here.

So when I preach, I preach not from my own wisdom, not my own power. I preach because this morning I said Lord, will you have your Spirit speak mightily through me. May you speak mightily through your word. What that means is, to be called into discipleship is to be called into the presence with his word. We cannot be in discipleship, we cannot be followers of Jesus, without the word. It doesn't mean you have to know all of it. It means that you're at least in it, you're drinking it. Because the Spirit doesn't use anything from his own, the Spirit only uses that which he has given: the word. And Jesus calls them into His presence. And that is what Jesus calls us to do: to be in his presence. And when we read his word, we are in his presence. It is not just ink on a page. It is the presence of the Living God, because his Spirit is present. And where the Spirit is present, the word will be applied, whether that word needs to be a word of comfort, a word of mercy, a word of grace, a word of conviction, a word of accountability, a word of promise. Jesus is here by his word and Spirit.

And he called these disciples to himself that they might be with him. And they began to learn by being with him. They learned to love. They learned to forgive. They learned humility. They learned proclamation. They learned authority. Not as abstract principles, but embodied truths in Jesus himself. Where do we learn these things? We learn them in his presence. He is wisdom, he is truth, he is the light, he is grace and mercy and forgiveness and love. We learn them by being with him and with his word.

Calling and the presence and then we see he calls them by name. And then what we learn, most interestingly, beyond the fact that they have these names. . . What we understand is they are then—it tells us—they will be **Sent** by him. And it tells us that he will “send them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons.” Now the beauty of this is, he calls them into his presence, and then he equips them and sends them out. Man, they don't really get it yet. But he continues to go with them, though at the same time he sends them.

As we go further in the book of Mark, we will see how this unfolds. Because this is not only Jesus looking back at something old, the calling of the twelve like the twelve tribes of Judah, going up to the mountain like Moses did, calling the people to the presence. Being in the presence with God, it's also something very new. It is God calling them into his presence. And they are able to be in his holy presence. It is Jesus who is the pure one, calling them to himself, giving them by way of apprenticeship and activity and doing. In relationship he's teaching them. But then he's going to send them out. And as we will see as the Gospel unfolds, they are going to do that, and they get some things really wrong.

And just looking forward, not giving away—though we might know the ending—it's this. It's only in Mark where we will get to a place in the Gospel of Mark where you will think these disciples do not have a clue. And that is on purpose. The writer of Mark is demonstrating that they don't have a clue oftentimes, but it is Jesus's presence with them that is faithful and good. And he will send them out. And where will that sending actually happen? When they receive the Holy Spirit at the Day of Pentecost. It's then that they begin to understand. It's then they begin to connect all the dots. It's then that they are equipped with the presence and strength

and power of God to be sent out. In other words, they are a work in progress, thanks be to God. And so are we.

So the first layer is something very unique that Jesus is establishing, yet it's something old, because it's pointing back to God calling the twelve tribes of Israel to himself, yet they fail to do. Now he's calling the twelve disciples. He—not Moses—he, the greater Moses, Jesus, the Son of the Living God, is calling his disciples to himself. He will teach them by living with them. He will teach them and send them out by the promised presence of his Spirit, with his authority. And they will be sent out to preach, proclaim, and witness to Jesus Christ. And the Kingdom of God, Israel, the true Israel, the Church of Jesus Christ, will be brought to fruition. This is the old, but also unique and new thing.

And Jesus will return, the word tells us. And it's marked—just as Jesus marked his teaching and presence with the disciples with a meal, so he now marks. . . he leaves them with the mark of a meal, the Lord's Supper. And he says until I return to you, continue to celebrate this supper. And remember what I have done for you, but also know that I'm coming, and this will end, and it will be finished with a great feast, the Son at the feast of the Lamb. This is what Jesus is doing by beginning here.

How are we to understand this? We are not the twelve disciples. There is something unique here, yet there is also something very every day for every Christian, and it is this. That while unique to the twelve, it is also an insight into what Jesus does in calling anyone to himself, as a follower of Jesus, as a Christian. It always begins with an invitation. And that invitation is first presented by revealing who Jesus is. This is important for the writer of Paul in the book of Ephesians. In the book of Ephesians Paul tells us that indeed, what he does is, he does so by calling us.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption [as sons] through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will.” [Ephesians 1:3-5, ESV]

He's saying his plan all along has been to invite us, and he invites us into relationship. He invites us into his presence. This is important for Paul when he says later in Ephesians:

“For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breath and the length and the height and the depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” [Ephesians 3:14-19, ESV]

He invites you in to his presence and he gives you his Spirit. And his Spirit strengthens you. His Spirit enables you to see and to experience grace that is greater than all our sin. Through the purity of the blood of Christ symbolized by this juice; the giving of his body symbolized by this

bread, Jesus covers our sin. He invites into his presence, covering us with his righteousness as the greatest bridegroom ever. And he loves us with a faithfulness and a tenderness and a knowledge that surpasses all understanding. And then, according to the wisdom of heaven, he then equips us to send us out to tell others, to witness to this king who invites us in to his presence, to forgiveness mercy and grace. And that God is continuing to unfold and establish His kingdom and grow it through sending us out as witnesses.

My question for you this morning is, again, where you in relationship to Jesus. Do you know that you are invited this morning? Do you know that you are invited not because of where you are, where you think you should be, or where you think God thinks you should be. The gospel is not about fitting in; the gospel is about finding the final place where you belong, in the presence of a holy God, covered by the righteous blood of Christ, and made new for eternity. He invites you because of who he is, and he loves you. And he invites you into his presence. And he gives you a word of promise and grace and love and mercy, so that we might be witnesses to him. What are you doing with this Jesus? Do you know him? Today can be the day of the first taste of the knowledge and experience of the king who has come, the king who is calling you. Is he calling you this morning? May this day be the first day of knowing that love.

And Christian, today is a day of renewal, a day of grace. Are you tired? Are you beleaguered? Are you doubting? Are you hurting? Are you wondering whether the Lord forgives you the hundredth time, the thousandth time? The good news of the gospel is yes and amen. Today is a day of renewal. And this table is that covenant renewal feast where we come again, not in our own strength, but in the wonderful work of Jesus. And he is present and he wants to feed you, Christian, to strengthen you, by faith through his Spirit. I know I'm long, but there you go. We are going to celebrate the Supper now, because I'm just excited about this passage. It's just good stuff. So thank you for hanging in there. Let's pray.

Father, we just ask you, I need this renewal today. We need this renewal today. Lord, will you renew us by this promise of calling, of presence, and of sending. You began this with your disciples to begin the beginning of the church, and it was a beleaguered group. One was even the one who would betray you. And yet in your grace and mercy you have continued through their ministry, through their writing, through your word, you are still calling us to your presence. And you call us to that again this morning. So I pray that all who can hear my voice, may they know your renewing grace this morning. And may those who do not yet and have not yet tasted of your grace, I pray that by your Spirit you may overwhelm them by your love and invite them into your presence today. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.