

## “The Dirty Dozen”

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 Cananaean, <sup>19</sup> and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. (ESV)

Today starts a new series because it starts a new part of the church calendar year. We just finished Advent. The church calendar begins with Advent, where we celebrate the coming of Jesus. Then the church calendar covers the Gospels - that's where we are now - the life and ministry of Jesus. Then into the summer you get the Epistles - the work of the Holy Spirit. So we're starting the Book of Mark. We worked through the first three chapters last year, and we're starting now at chapter three in verse 7.

I know this is going to surprise a lot of you. When I was a kid I was a latch-key kid. My mother was working two jobs. She was always gone. We didn't have computers and there were only three channels on television. Yet, on Saturday afternoon you almost always could count on a great World War II or World War I movie. I loved that. I mean I looked forward to that. So it's going to surprise some of you, I know, that I used to watch every Saturday afternoon. I would be glued in front of the World War II movie and dream about the day that some day I might be a soldier and a hero. Remember all those movies: “Kelly's Heroes,” and “The Big Red One,” and all those? My favorite of all of them, maybe it's because of the title, was “The Dirty Dozen.” “The Dirty Dozen” was about this major (Lee Marvin) who is given the mission to basically disrupt the German officers shortly before D-Day. He's given a mission to attack a French chateau where all the officers are congregating. It's going to be a suicide mission, so what he does, is he goes and chooses twelve criminals and offers them their freedom if they will go on this mission, they have a chance at freedom. They got their name “Dirty Dozen” (it's really the only thing that's clear in my mind after all these years) is he's trying to toughen them up and he wouldn't give them any hot water, and he told them to shave because they were going to be inspected. And one of the guys yells, “We ain't shavin' until we get hot water.” He said, “I guess you'll just be the dirty dozen then.” That's how it ended.

What does that have to do with our text today? Well, it has everything to do with it. We're going to talk today about another “Dirty Dozen.” We usually call them “apostles.” What they have in common with the original Dirty Dozen, among other things, is that they weren't looking for the job. The job found them. In other words, in Jesus' day it was much like it is today for college students who begin maybe in tenth and eleventh grade thinking where they want to go to college and they start preparing for SATs and ACTs, and that kind of thing. And then they begin to apply to colleges. They put their best foot forward in hopes of getting into the school they want. In Jesus' day it was like that, as well, except that you would do that with a Rabbi. You would go and beg a Rabbi to take you on as a student. You wanted to study under Gamaliel or someone like that. It was totally unheard of, and upside down and backwards, for a Rabbi to go around and pick his students. Yet that's what Jesus did. The only thing that Jesus' disciples really have in common with each other is that none of them were a member of the religious establishment of Jesus' day. Not one of them. If you remember from last year, and I know you do, when we looked at the first three chapters of Mark, the first section of the Book of Mark closes or finishes in verse six, and it's sort of a summary of the opening to Jesus' ministry. And if that's the summary to the opening of Jesus' ministry, we can see that the goal of Jesus' ministry apparently was to frustrate and anger all of the religious and political establishment of his day, and He did a fantastic job. In fact, He did such a good job the religious and political people worked together, if you look at verse 6 of chapter 3 it says,

<sup>6</sup> The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him. (ESV)

So that closes the first section of the Book of Mark where the religious Jewish people plotting with the political Jewish people. Both of them saying, “We need to get rid of this guy.” Was it because Jesus was a bad guy? Absolutely not. He went around doing good. It was because they held people in their grasp by defining for them how law ought to be obeyed. Over and over again Jesus said things like, “You heard it said . . . , but I say.” The thing that got him in the most trouble of all

was the fact was that He used to heal people on the Sabbath, and the Sabbath was the thing they held most dear, the thing they controlled the most.

As we transition, you see Jesus leaving and withdrawing from them. We have two points this morning. The first point is going to be the crush of the crowd. The second point will simply be the “Dirty Dozen,” just because I love that title. We’re going to look at the disciples very briefly this morning. Let’s look first at the crush of the crowd.

<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 “You are the Son of God.” (ESV)*

[A map of ancient Israel is projected on a screen.] Why did I put this up here? It was more than just I thought it would be cool. I just wanted to show you the geographic dispersion of where all these people were coming from. The religious leaders and the political leaders hated Jesus and sought to do away with Him, and yet that’s about a 120-mile stretch between places people could come from. You have Sidon at the very north, Idumea is a region at the bottom. Trans-Jordan is basically everything to the east, and then everything up to the Mediterranean. In other words, people were coming from the north, the south, the east and the west. They were coming from everywhere to get to Jesus. They were coming from all over the known world (to them) to pursue Jesus. The question is, “Why?”

I had a seminary professor who would always say to us, “Gentlemen, you’ll be successful if you remember everyone’s favorite radio station.” We’d say, “What do you mean by that, Bill?” He’d say, “Everybody’s favorite radio station is WIFM – What’s In it For Me? If you remember that you’ll be successful in life. That’s what people want. It’s actually rather crass in the language used here where it says they sought Him and came around Him and He was afraid they’d crush Him. The word there is more than just “crush,” it’s almost malicious. It’s malignant. It’s almost an evil, that they’re coming around not because they desire Him, they’re coming around Him and pursuing Him from all over because of what He can do for them. That makes sense, does it not? If you’re sick, if you have cancer, if you have some malady, people go to incredible extremes and try incredible things in order to find a remedy. What have you got to lose? So, if you hear about this rabbi who is walking around and healing people of all their diseases, why wouldn’t you come from 120 miles away even if you had to walk in order to be healed? That makes sense. But the question you have to ask yourself is “Why do I pursue Jesus?” Do you pursue Jesus because of Who He is or only because of what He can do for you? A way to tell if you pursue Jesus because of what He can do for you rather than because of Who He is, is you tend to be frustrated and angry a lot, which is pretty convicting to me, actually. Why? Because if you’re pursuing Jesus for what He can do for you, He’s almost never going to do what you want Him to do, so therefore you’re always going to be upset. If you’re pursuing Jesus for Who He is, you can never be upset because the closer you get the more beautiful He is. The closer you get the more desirable He is. The closer you get, the more peace you have, and so the question is, “Why am I pursuing Jesus, because of what I think He can do for me or because of who He is?” There’s another interesting twist here because apparently the crowd really didn’t know who He was. They knew He was this guy who could heal people. I love reading commentaries (it’s one of the benefits of my job) and to see theologians and Biblical scholars argue over what a text means. A lot of people said, “The reason that Jesus withdrew to the sea is because He’s repeating the sea as in the Old Testament which is the place of chaos and demonic activity, and he’s drawing away to the sea in order to relive the wilderness experience.” I think that’s just way too complicated. That’s my opinion. I think the reason he withdrew to the sea was almost purely for pragmatism because at the sea he could stand in a boat and not be crushed. At the sea he could preach across the water and the sound would carry and people would hear Him. So that’s one part. The other part is, if you notice in this text, there was one group of people who actually did know Who Jesus was. They didn’t want Him either, but they recognized Him. Another big debate is Jesus’ response to them. Look at verses 11 and 12.

<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. (ESV)*

Why did they say that? Why would they shout that out? And then why would Jesus tell them to be quiet if it was true? There are several different theories for why they may have shouted that out. The first one is if you remember back to the Old Testament or if you’ve ever seen the movie, “Hell Boy.” Basically the concept in the Old Testament was that if you knew someone’s true name, if you knew their true identity and said it, you would have power over them. That’s why when Jacob wrestles the angel. Jacob is really only concerned about one thing, “Tell me your name.” He thinks if he can speak the name of the angel, that somehow he will have control over the angel. So maybe by the demons speaking the name, “Son of God” they think that they will be able to control Jesus. Obviously it didn’t work. Have you ever seen, “The Dog Whisperer”

(Cesar Millan)? When a dog gets out of line he just goes “Pffsssst.” That’s all he does. That’s what Jesus reminds me of here. Whenever demons come around, they seek to speak His name to have power over Him and they’re just like little yapping dogs. “Pffsssst.” Because he is the Son of God. They might also say His name because they’re trying to force His hand. You have a huge crowd there and if you can get people drummed up and thinking, “Maybe this is the Son of God. Maybe this is the Messiah. Maybe this is the king.” They’d put Him on their shoulders and march Him in through Jerusalem, and then Jesus’ plan to ultimately die would be foiled. So those are the two governing theories. The other question is, “Why would Jesus tell them to be quiet?” For one, maybe He was just showing them, “I’m the boss here and you are nothing.” “Pffsssst.” Maybe he’s just showing His authority. I think there’s something else here, at least in the structure of the text. You see that the demons were giving the story, but they weren’t giving the whole story. He certainly was the Son of God but they didn’t also say that He was the Son of Man. They couldn’t have given the whole story, and to tell that whole story would have been reserved for someone else. There’s a sense here as you read the flow of this text that Jesus is saying, “Pffsssst. Proclaiming who I am is going to be someone else’s job, not demons.” “If demons aren’t saying who you are, then who’s going to proclaim your name?” Who else but the Dirty Dozen? Right? “The fishermen that are cussing back there, they’re the ones. The Dirty Dozen will proclaim my name.” That’s where Jesus goes next. He tells the demons to stop preaching and stop proclaiming His name, then He picks twelve people out who He actually encourages and sends to preach. That’s where we’ll look next. The first two verses here have a lot of theological significance. It says in verse 13,

*<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. (ESV)*

Whenever you talk about “the mountain” or “mountains” in the Old Testament certainly, but especially in the Gospel of Mark as well, you begin to get into sort of theological territory because on the mountain is where you meet God. You want to get the Ten Commandments? Go up Sinai. You want to meet God? Go up Zion. You want the transfiguration? You go up on the mountain. So Jesus, it says, very stately goes up on the mountain. Then what’s interesting is Who He calls to Himself. I wish I had another twenty or thirty minutes at this particular point because it says that, “Jesus called those whom He desired.” No one else. He called those whom He desired, and did you notice their response? “And they came to Him.” The call of Jesus is effective. Those whom Jesus desires to be in relationship will be in relationship to Him. On the other hand, the question is, “Do you hear Jesus calling you?” “Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling, come home sinner, come home.” Do you hear that? If you hear it, you need to go. Go to Jesus, run to Him. Jesus calls those whom He desires.

Then He gave the apostles a commission. He called them for two reasons. The second reason is two-fold. In many ways He does the same thing with us, and there’s a little difference in one of them. Notice the first thing that He called the disciples to do. First it says He appointed twelve, and that’s the language of creation. “He made them twelve.” The reason for twelve is that Israel, at that point, was down to about two tribes and everyone thought the gig was up, and Jesus forms twelve tribes representing the twelve tribes of Israel. He’s renewing the nation of Israel and He’s renewing all of creation through these twelve. Here’s how they’re going to renew all of creation. It says, “He named them also apostles so that they might be really busy doing lots of stuff for Him (not!) and then sent them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons.” Did you notice the reason that Jesus called disciples to Himself? The reason he made these people to be apostles is, “so that they might be with him,” period. It doesn’t say, “so that they might do great works,” it doesn’t say, “so that they might be mighty in power and all these other things.” It says, “so that they might be with Him.” When you begin to think about the Gospel and the Christian faith, the indicative - who you are always comes before the imperative - what you should do. The question you have to ask yourself if you’re also a disciples of Jesus is, “Is my life defined by being with Jesus and everything grows out of that?” Or, “Is my life defined by doing things for Jesus?” If your life is defined by doing things for Jesus, you’re going to be miserable most of the time because of this reason. Jesus doesn’t really need you to do a lot of stuff for Him. The reason Jesus calls us unto Himself first and foremost and primarily is that we might be with Him. He called the disciples and the apostles so that they might be with Him. Then after being, then they do. What were they to do? They were to preach the Gospel “so that they might preach and have authority to cast out demons.”

Now there’s some overlap between them and us. We also are sent out. Every week when we do the benediction you’re sent out to share the Gospel with those around you. The difference is between our authority and their authority. You see, Jesus was basically extending His ministry through them, and He was going to start the church through them. When He gave them authority to cast out demons it was authority that basically would confirm the Gospel they preach because they didn’t have a Bible to preach from. I know lots of people debate, “Tommy, can believers cast out demons today? Do we have authority to cast out demons?” I always tell people, “Go ahead and try it.” Honestly, we may or we may not. Certainly the Holy Spirit is within us and certainly we have God’s Spirit to give us power, but this authority given to the apostles, I think probably was only for them.

The next thing that's interesting as we get to the list of apostles is that you see something in Mark that you don't really see in the other Gospels as much. They all have lists of the disciples, but what Mark emphasizes more than the rest is the fact that most of them had nicknames. That's important. Jesus apparently gave disciples nicknames. Of course I couldn't help but think about when I was in the Army. When I was in the Ranger Battalion most people had a nickname. Your nickname always had something to say about you or it was something that was very ironic about you, or both. My nickname for example was "Mullet." I came from South Florida and fished every day. Somehow someone found that out. Someone wrote a letter to me addressed "Mullet Allen" and "Mullet" stuck. Interestingly enough in the providence of God, my first roommate's nickname was "Catfish." That's true. They used to call us "Catfish and Mullet – the Attack Fish." I was Alpha team leader, he was Bravo team leader. When they needed us in the dead of night, they would signal us by doing this. [Holding wrists up to jaw and flexing fingers like gills.] That's true! I had a machine gunner, his name was "The Edge" because he looked just like "The Edge" in U2 [rock group]. My squadron leader's nickname was "Smack." We even had a guy who we called, "Rock." Why do you call someone "Rock"? Because all things being equal, he was pretty dumb, to be honest with you. Which, of course, leads me to Peter. Why did Jesus do that? [Give Simon a nickname that means "Rock"?] Remember in the Gospel of John, Andrew brings Peter and Peter doesn't even get a chance to "choose Jesus." Jesus says, "From now one you're 'Peter,' the Rock." You have to think if you're Peter, "Is that a good thing or a bad thing? He doesn't even know me and He's calling me a rock." The answer is both, because if you read through the Gospels, Peter at some times is incredibly rock-like. He's incredibly slow. On the other hand, you read through the Gospels and Jesus says, "On this rock I'll build My church." You see, there's a twist to the name. I think James and John are actually funnier just because I can imagine Jesus laughing. James and John, remember, are the ones who came up and asked, "Should we call down thunder and lightning on these cities?" Jesus says, "Sons of thunder, calm down boys." And yet, the apostle John, what is he known for? Jesus called them the "Sons of thunder." Yet we know the apostle John is the apostle of love. There couldn't be any greater difference, but that's how nicknames work, isn't it? You work through here and it's interesting. Some of these may be nicknames, some might not be. But he says in verse 18,

<sup>18</sup> *Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus . . . (ESV)*

Mathew it's also "the son of Alphaeus" so you probably have three sets of brothers here. And you have Thaddaeus. Thaddaeus you sometimes get confused because I think Luke calls him Judas the son of James, but you can see how the name of Judas wouldn't have been particularly popular in the first century. Then you have, Simon the Cananaean or Simon the Zealot. And the last one, "Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him."

Now Judas is the most interesting one to me because we know that the reason Simon Peter is called Simon Peter is because Jesus said, "From now on – Peter." "From now on – James Boanerges." We don't have a record of it, but you wonder if Jesus met Judas and said, "Judas, you'll be called Iscariot." It would be interesting however, because "Iscariot" means one of two things. One of the things it could mean is "from the city of Carious" or something like that, which is pretty vague. On the other hand it could mean something like "knife wielder" or "back stabber." You wonder if Jesus calls him that and He's the only one in on the joke. We're in on the joke because it says the very next thing:

<sup>19</sup> and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. (ESV)

I tend to read liberal theologians and conservative theologians and everything in between, and biblical scholars. It's interesting how people on the more liberal end of the continuum say that, "The fact that Judas Iscariot is in here shows that this text in Mark is not authentic," they would say. They'd say, "It's such a scandal, the early church, if that was true wouldn't have included it, they wouldn't have shown us that. Yet if you really understand the Gospel you look at this text and the fact that it says, "Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him" the fact that it is in there confirms everything we know about the Gospel. The Gospel is not about looking good and maintaining face. What the Gospel is about is the fact that Jesus came and lived the life you and I should have lived and He died the death we should have died, and that was all triggered by this one person who's name was "Iscariot" betraying him. The worst possible event that could happen to someone, betrayal, is the thing that won our freedom. That's why it's there. That's why it's true.

If you find an old trailer for "The Dirty Dozen" or an old poster, it says, "Train them, excite them, and arm them, then set them lose on the Nazis." You're supposed to be excited. When you look at the twelve disciples, that's exactly what Jesus did. He trained them, He excited them, He armed them with the Holy Spirit and He set them lose on the world. Now the difference between the twelve apostles and The Dirty Dozen in the movie is in the movie three of The Dirty Dozen survive the suicide mission. With the apostles, only one does. Only one survives, and in a sense, Jesus sent them on this suicide mission. Now, the interesting thing is just this: every one of those disciples died swearing that the Gospel of Jesus was true. All they had to do is say, "It's not true. We didn't see what we said we saw. Jesus didn't rise from the dead." Yet every one of them was willing to go to their death in defense of that fact because they were the true Dirty Dozen. Think about that.