

The Lord Jesus Ministers to Large Crowds

Mark 3:7-12

Mark 3:7-12 – “But Jesus withdrew with His disciples to the sea. And a great multitude from Galilee followed Him, and from Judea ⁸ and Jerusalem and Idumea and beyond the Jordan; and those from Tyre and Sidon, a great multitude, when they heard how many things He was doing, came to Him. ⁹ So He told His disciples that a small boat should be kept ready for Him because of the multitude, lest they should crush Him. ¹⁰ For He healed many, so that as many as had afflictions pressed about Him to touch Him. ¹¹ And the unclean spirits, whenever they saw Him, fell down before Him and cried out, saying, “You are the Son of God.” ¹² But He sternly warned them that they should not make Him known.”

Background Notes

Jesus withdrew with His disciples to the Sea of Galilee. That doesn't mean they got onto a cruise ship or lived on a houseboat. No, it means He left the town where He had been ministering, and began instead to minister along the shores of the Sea of Galilee.

Most likely he had been in Capernaum, a village situated on the northwest side of the Sea of Galilee, but the Pharisees and the Herodians joined forces together and began to plot “*how they might destroy Him*” (v6). So the Lord withdrew from that village and began to minister outside the center of town along the shores of the Sea of Galilee. People came from all over the land to hear the Lord preach as well as to see His miracles - a great multitude! Many, of course, came primarily to be healed.

They not only came all the way from Jerusalem, about 100 miles to the south - they also came from Idumea - a region south of Judea. The Idumeans were a racially mixed people whose roots went back to Edom and the Edomites, the descendants of Esau. The “Herods” were Idumean. People also came from beyond the Jordan, from the territories of Perea and the Decapolis. Many Gentiles lived in the Decapolis area and some in Perea as well. So the crowds coming from beyond the Jordan would have included many Gentiles.

Furthermore, we read that some came from the vicinity of Tyre and Sidon. Tyre and Sidon were cities of Phoenicia, about 50 miles to the northwest along the Mediterranean Sea.

So again we see the Lord reaching out to the Gentiles as He ministered to this wide variety of peoples, and the fact that our Lord reached out beyond the borders of Israel to minister to any and all Gentiles who came to Him leads us to our first doctrinal point for this passage.

Doctrinal Points

1. The rejection of Jesus by the Jews resulted in the grace of God going out to the Gentiles.

The Lord Jesus was born into this world as the Jewish Messiah, but Israel, as a nation, rejected Him as their King. John 1:11: *“He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.”* As a result of this rejection, the gospel of God’s grace went out to the whole world - *“whosoever will may come.”* John 1:11-12: *He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.”*

It’s important to realize that this doctrinal point does *not* mean that God’s grace was withheld from Gentiles in Old Testament times. Remember Rahab the Canaanite. God’s grace certainly extended to her and her family as she was saved. Remember the account of Jonah the prophet. He was sent to Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire - one of the cruelest of all of the ancient pagan nations. And yet, at the preaching of Jonah, people of Nineveh repented, and God’s grace was shown. Judgment was withheld. So God’s grace to the Gentiles certainly was seen in the Old Testament, but it was primarily focused on the Jewish people—God’s chosen people.

Furthermore, our doctrinal point does *not* mean that Jews today can’t be saved. Certainly a Jewish person can accept Christ today, and will be just as much a part of the body of Christ as any saved Gentile.

Our doctrinal point means that when the Lord was rejected by the Jewish people, and they disowned Him as their Messiah, the focus of the grace of God shifted to the Gentiles. As Romans 11:11 says, *“But through their fall, ...salvation has come to the Gentiles”*—that is, through the Jews rejecting Jesus as their Messiah, salvation has come to the Gentiles.

In this passage there is a parable of a tree that represents the place of blessing from God toward man. The Jewish people are like the natural branches of the tree. They were God’s chosen people, in the place of God’s blessing - but the branches were broken off because of their unbelief. As the gospel goes out to the Gentiles, Gentiles who come to Christ are seen as wild olive branches that are being grafted into the tree. But Romans 11 indicates that the natural branches that were broken off, the Jewish people, will once again be grafted in if they no longer persist in their unbelief. In a future day, the grace of God will again focus on the nation of Israel.

Where do we see this doctrinal point taught in Mark 3:7-12? I think we see a spiritual picture of this point. The Pharisees and Herodians, representatives of the Jewish nation, joined forces and began to plot how they might destroy the Lord Jesus, so the Lord withdrew to the Sea. Many times in Scripture the “sea” is a symbol of the Gentile nations. Because of their unbelief, the Lord turned away from the Jewish community and began to minister to the crowds that consisted of many Gentiles. This is very possibly a spiritual picture that the Holy Spirit has given us, that the rejection of Jesus by the Jews resulted in the grace of God going out to the Gentiles.

2. The extent of Christ's healing miracles is a picture of the scope of salvation.

Verse 10: *"For He healed many, so that as many as had afflictions pressed about Him to touch Him."* It seems that every person in the crowd who needed healing and made the effort to reach out in faith was healed. What about the people in Jerusalem, and Idumea, and beyond the Jordan, and in Tyre and Sidon who were sick and diseased, but who didn't come to the Lord Jesus to reach out in faith to be healed? They were not healed. Our Lord did not heal every blind person or lame person when He was here on this earth. Only certain people who came to the Lord for healing and certain people whom the Lord selected were healed.

Certainly the Lord **could** have healed **everyone**. It wasn't that the Lord Jesus had limited healing power. No! He had unlimited healing power! What a picture of the scope of salvation - the scope of the healing from the disease of sin. The work of Christ on the cross is **unlimited in scope**. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ is sufficient for every person in the world to be saved. But not everyone is saved, because **the work of Christ is only effective for those who believe**. I believe that we have a picture of this truth in the healing miracles of Christ. The extent of Christ's healing miracles is a picture of the scope of salvation.

Practical Application

You can expect problems in a successful ministry.

Our Lord had a very successful ministry - but there were problems associated with that success - logistical problems and spiritual problems.

In verses 9-10 we see the logistical problems: *"So He told His disciples that a small boat should be kept ready for Him because of the multitude, lest they should crush Him. For He healed many, so that as many as had afflictions pressed about Him to touch Him."* The crowd literally crowded Him; they pressed in on Him and gave Him no space. This hindered our Lord's teaching ministry. How was this logistical problem solved? The Lord used a boat - probably Peter's - as a platform. We, too, will have logistical problems in a successful ministry. Crowds are a nice problem to have in a ministry, but crowds can bring logistical headaches – and we must figure out how to deal with these problems of success!

Some of you remember the Friday night Bible studies that we had in our home, where we provided supper. Lots of people came - in fact, sometimes there were too many people for the dynamics of the Bible study as it was originally designed. What do you do with logistical problems? You solve them, as the Lord did. You change the format of the ministry to adapt to new needs, or you move to a new location, or any number of ideas. In the illustration of our home Bible study, we tapered off on the food, and the crowd size resumed the right size for the dynamics of the Bible study!

Verses 11-12 mention a spiritual problem the Lord faced because of His successful ministry: *“And the unclean spirits, whenever they saw Him, fell down before Him and cried out, saying, ‘You are the Son of God.’ But He sternly warned them that they should not make Him known.”*

The demons became active when they saw that many people were following Jesus, so they began to disrupt things by having the people they possessed fall down before Him and cry out, *“You are the Son of God.”* This was not a confession of faith on the part of these people - it was a disruption of the teaching ministry. The Lord solved this problem by warning those unclean spirits. *“He sternly warned them that they should not make Him known.”* The Lord did not want the testimony of demons disrupting a successful ministry.

We, too, can expect spiritual problems to arise when we’re involved in a successful ministry. As an illustration - once or twice I’ve had to ask disruptive people to leave studies or ministries that I’ve been involved in. You may say, “Oh, that’s cruel!” No, it’s not cruel. All kinds of spiritual problems will arise to hinder or stop successful ministries – and these disruptions usually involve disruptive people! You’ve got to deal with the problems in the best and most loving way that you can – and sometimes that means using “tough love.”

You can expect logistical and spiritual problems in a successful ministry.