

How Disciples Shine in an Economic Crisis – Mark 3:7-19
Series: Look and Live #12

Philippians 2:14-15: “Do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.”

As a Christian, there’s supposed to be something about you that is provocatively *different* from those around you. Your *difference* is supposed to be as obvious as walking around the downtown streets of Jefferson City with a neon marquee attached to your forehead. Among “this generation” you’re shining like spotlights. You’re *standing out*. You’re *different*. You don’t *fit*. There is something provocatively different about you that makes people say, “You’re a little bit weird!” If you fit in just perfectly, something’s not right.

So what is it about our response to the current economic crisis that is provocatively different from everybody else’s? What is it about our response to the notice at work that there might be lay-offs, to the stock-market decline, or to our friends comments that is *different* from everyone else’s, such that you’re shining as light in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, as Paul said? **Or, are we responding just like everyone else? If that’s the case, our light has gone out.**

This particular national trial is not one of those things that just happens far off in Washington; this is happening in our back yards. As your pastor, there aren’t too many financial situations that are going to affect almost all of us in this room; so this is something that, at this time in the life of our nation, we need to think about. The call of the Word of God this morning is: *don’t waste your economic crisis!* Don’t waste this difficult situation by living through it, complaining about it, stressing about it, or responding to it just like everyone else in the nation. What a wasted time to shine as lights. **Read Mark 3:7-19.**

Mark is painting a picture here of the effect Jesus’ ministry was having on the entire region. People were coming from all around to see, hear, and be blessed by Jesus. He was incredibly popular. (Even Gentile lands like Tyre and Sidon were coming to see him.)

The effect of all these travelers closing in on Jesus doesn’t seem all that great. Verse 9 indicates that the people were crowding in on Jesus (Mark uses violent language) and Jesus secures an escape boat to keep close at hand. This doesn’t sound like the calm pictures we normally see of Jesus teaching. This sounds more like Hollywood paparazzi attacking celebrities. These people were swarming Jesus.

In verse 13, he left that and got away from that hype to go up to an isolated place on a mountain. Instead of anybody and everybody chasing after him, this time he decided who came with. Those whom he desired he called to follow him up the mountain. That’s when he made them his official disciples. It’s as if it became necessary at this point in Jesus’ ministry (because of the large number of followers and people swarming him to see miracles) to define who his real disciples really were.

He calls them *apostles* because these are the men Jesus hand-picks to send out into the nations. Apostello = verb to send; apostle = noun for sent one. The important part here is not that they're apostles but that they're true disciples in contrast to the other group.

I'm convinced there are twelve men called by Jesus here because there were twelve tribes of Israel. Jesus will make this connection twice later on. Mark is careful to tell us that there were twelve (and the apostles will be careful to *preserve* twelve of them, even when one of them betrays Jesus and has to be replaced). So twelve is not incidental; twelve is essential to this story.

It seems that Jesus wants to make a point: the twelve sons of Jacob were the beginnings of the people of God in the Old Testament. Now **these twelve men are the first pillars of a new community of God's people, the Church!** These are the real disciples, a rag-tag hodge-podge mix of men who, earthly speaking, do not belong together. But they are united in Jesus Christ, they're new master. Anyone who comes after them can become part of this community of God's people in the same way that these twelve did on that day.

So what's the point of all this? Well this wonderful, true story tells us two realities about being a true disciple of Jesus that are particularly helpful for us to know and think about today as we sit here in the middle of an economic recession.

1) **Disciples aren't just attracted to Jesus**

- a) There is a strong movement in many Christian circles to say, "Let's stop talking about dating. Dating is a horrible concept."
 - i) When I hear dating, I think the following: begin a relationship with a person I know nothing about, grow in intimacy and commitment until I decide they cannot make me happy for the rest of my life, break-up with them if they have not already broken up with me, and start the process all over again with someone else.
 - ii) There are so many biblical problems with that it's hard to know where to even start. (Check out Joshua Harris' book I Kissed Dating Goodbye.)
- b) What's happening in the first story in our text when men and women are flocking to Jesus is a lot like dating. They're kind of dating Jesus, but Jesus is not interested in being your date. They are temporarily attracted to him because they think he can do a lot of things for them. They have needs and wants so they come to him because they think he will give them all that they need (whether that's settling a debate, healing their lame knee, getting rid of a chronic cough, etc.). In other words, they're *attracted* to Jesus.
 - i) Consider this: how many of these frenzied crowd members will be there in a couple years, surrounding that wretched implement of execution while Jesus' blood stains the weeds around the cross? Where did they all go? Where are all of the men and women *pushing* and *shoving* just to touch him?
 - ii) They moved on. They're no longer attracted to Jesus because it doesn't look like he's going to meet their selfish needs right this second so they moved on to some other love affair.
 - iii) How many of us are simply attracted to Jesus? How many of us are just dating Christ? And the world knows it. The world sees it and they despise Christianity for it. They know that many of us are here right now because we want to feel good about ourselves (or we want to have our selfish needs met) and we think that Jesus might be one place we could do that.

- iv) That's not a disciple of Jesus Christ. That's not a member of God's Kingdom people. That's just someone dating the church.
- c) Look at the real disciples. What a stark contrast. These men are going to be with Jesus till the end! Probably 11 out of 12 will be martyred for Jesus. These are not fair-weather fans of Jesus. They are not friends of Jesus so long as the sun shines brightly and they never get rained on. And why? Why are *they* so different from the rest?
 - i) Are they that much braver? Are they that much more honorable and virtuous? No. In fact, for a moment when Jesus is betrayed we'll see that the disciples are just as capable of being fickle and selfish and abandoning the cause of Jesus as all the rest. Here's the difference: Jesus did a work in the disciples. It wasn't the men themselves who were different; it was just what Jesus was doing *in them* that made them different.
 - ii) The difference is John 17:12 and John 10:27-29.
 - iii) True disciples, true Kingdom people of God did not just walk up and choose Jesus one day because they thought, "Yeah, Jesus could really be good for me."
 - iv) No, *he* choose them. *He* brought them to himself. *He* gave them eternal life. *He* holds them in the palm of his hand. *He* keeps them from falling away. *He* will not permit them to be lost, snatched away, or distracted. He keeps them committed and following him, if they are true sheep. Big difference between *that* and just being attracted to Jesus for the moment because my knee hurts and I hear he fixes hurting knees.
- d) So what does this have to do with a 21st century economic crisis?
 - i) **If Christ's disciples weren't attracted to him because of the prospect of health and wealth, then true disciples will not be repelled by the lack thereof!**
 - ii) Or: if the prospect of *getting health and wealth* was not what brought you to Jesus, then the reality of losing health and wealth will not take you *away* from Jesus.
 - iii) If your 401K has sunk into the mud and that makes you *upset* or *frustrated* with Christ, you're a fair-weather fan. You're in this so long as it's good for you and your glory. You're in this because you thought that coming to Jesus would be a good way to stay or to get healthy and wealthy. When it didn't work out, when your plans were spoiled, you got mad.
 - iv) That's not a disciple of Jesus Christ. Jesus promised us *a cross* not a padded retirement where we can sit around playing 18 holes of golf. If that's why you're following Jesus, then you're *not really following Jesus*.
- e) Don't waste this economic crisis!
 - i) This is our chance to *shine* in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation who *loves* and *lives* for getting more money. This is our chance to say, "I don't love money. I don't live for dollars and cents. And I don't belong to Jesus Christ because I think he can serve my wallet well." The only place this world has for religion and for Jesus is him serving their gods of health and wealth. But that's not us, and this is the best chance we've had in a long time to prove that powerfully.
 - ii) You can *take* my money. You can *take* my dreams of retiring lazily in Florida, but you can't have my joy in Christ. I'll go on living my life with complete joy as though my life had not ultimately changed. You can't have my Christ-rooted-joy, because the economy does not change him.
 - iii) O *don't waste the* economic crisis! Shine forth the infinite, supreme value of Jesus Christ compared to the worthless monetary value of the dollar bill.

2) **Second reality: disciples have *Christ* himself as their ultimate purpose**

- a) Check out verse 14 again.
- b) In this particular historical context, this is bigger than we realize.
 - i) The reason disciples gathered around teachers was always so that they could learn something from the teacher about something bigger than both of them.
 - ii) For Jews, this would be the Law. A man would become a disciple of a teacher in order to grow in his knowledge of the Law and in obedience to the Law *through* the wisdom and experience of the teacher.
 - iii) But here something strange happens. Jesus gathers this new group of men, not so they could grow in knowledge and obedience of the Law, but just so they could be with him.
- c) For the true disciples, Jesus was ultimate. Nothing was bigger or more central to their new lives than Jesus himself. That's what happens when Jesus makes you one of his disciples. He becomes your number one desire. Just seeing him; just enjoying him; just knowing him; just glorifying and praising him.
- d) **Read Psalm 27:4, Psalm 17:15, and Philippians 3:8.**
- e) In the first paragraph, the twelve men were down there with all the other men and women clamoring to touch Jesus. They all had as their chief passion *themselves*.
- f) But when Jesus called those men up the mountain he gave them a new heart. That meant he put *a new chief desire* and passion inside them. Being with Jesus is the aim and hope of their entire existence. Their joy is now wrapped up in being with him.
- g) So what about the economy? What about the massive job lay-offs, even right here in central Missouri?
- h) Back to the original question: what is it about our response to the current economic crisis that is provocatively different from everybody else's?
- i) Imagine this scenario:
 - i) If I'm one of those at the foot of the mountain coming to Jesus because I hear he can do all kinds of great things to make my life better, then my worldly satisfaction is my biggest concern in life (my ultimate purpose).
 - ii) Let's say I go to Schulte's grocery because my wife asked me to get several tomatoes; I walk up to the produce aisle only to find out that tomato prices have drastically increased. I start to complain to myself. I try to find a manager to complain to, and I threaten never to come back.
 - iii) Once in the checkout line, I continue my frustration by venting to the checkout lady. When I get home, aggravated, I walk through the door and complain to my wife.
 - iv) Over the next few days as people bring up the difficult economy, I'll be sure to tell them how much I paid for over-ripen tomatoes.
- j) Now think about that. I chose something deliberately small and petty to show the silliness of the situation.
 - i) What does that scenario say about my number one desire in life when I walk into that store rejoicing in Jesus Christ and I walk out with a ruined day because tomatoes went up .50/lb.? Doesn't it say, at the very least, that there are things more central and more important than being with Christ? The reason I'm upset with this inanimate bag of fruit is because ultimately, what I'm seeking is material comfort, but Schulte's just got in the way.

- ii) If I think that I'm a disciple of Jesus Christ and that if I were to lose my job or get cancer, I'd still rejoice in hi, but then I walk into the store and my joy is snatched away by two or three dollars, I am self-deceived.
- iii) (You can substitute anything in the place of tomatoes...gas prices, milk, eggs, year-end bonus, a stimulus check.)
- iv) Again, what is it about my response to the current economic crisis that is provocatively different from everybody else's?
- k) This is as close to hardship as my generation has ever come. This is the closest we've come in a long time to having the opportunity to shine forth with our lives and our response to difficult financial situations and to say, "This world is not my home! I'm not living for money. I just want to be *with* Christ! Just him! He is my desire. One thing I have sought after: that I may dwell in his house forever and ever. Take my car. Repossess my house. Lay me off from my job. Liquidate my retirement fund. Raise the price of gas and tomatoes. I'm still pursuing him, rejoicing in him, and finding my delight and satisfaction in Christ and in him alone!"
- l) If Paul could say in Philippians 1 that even *death* is gain, if even *that* tribulation would be gain because he would gain Christ, should we not be ashamed when we groan and complain about losing something that was never supposed to mean anything to us in the first place?

True disciples of Jesus Christ, *shine* today as you live for something so much more than an economic stimulus package.

That is not our hope. The senate is not our hope. Let's not talk like it. Let's not *complain* as though our joy was gone. Let's not *bicker* as though our satisfaction was gone. Let's not *mourn* as though our support was gone. Christ is still with us, and we are still his. That is our joy! Publish that joy with your face, with your giving, with your speech, your conversations, your lack of complaining, and your continual praise of Him.

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