

Mk. 3:7-12 ESV (modified) – A Great Crowd Follows Jesus to the Sea

Jesus withdrew with His disciples to the sea,
and a great crowd followed,

from Galilee and Judea

⁸ 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.

⁹ And He told His disciples

to have a boat ready for Him

because of the crowd,

lest they crush Him,

¹⁰ for He had healed many,

so that all who had diseases pressed around Him to touch Him.

¹¹ And whenever the unclean spirits saw Him,

they fell down before Him and cried out,

"You are the Son of God."

¹² And He strictly ordered them not to make Him known.

This section marks somewhat of a transition from the beginning of Jesus' ministry to the climax of the conflict that arose against His ministry from the Pharisees and the Herodians. It is a continuation of Jesus' ministry, but it has a foreshadowing function to many details of Jesus' ministry that will be expanded upon in the following chapters.

Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the sea – While withdrawing does sound like Jesus is making a retreat (which would make perfect sense given the last words Mark wrote describe a very real and tangible threat against Jesus), Jesus is not retreating as though defeated, but moving on to a different phase in His ministry. Just like earlier when He withdrew from Capernaum (Mark 1:37-39), He again is on the move, but the end result will be more and more people who are touched by His ministry. The previous times Jesus was near the sea of Galilee, He was there to call disciples to follow Him (Mark 1:16 and 2:13). In the following few chapters, the sea will loom large as the setting of important events of Jesus' ministry. Although this setting is different from the synagogues where He had been teaching before, it offers a bit more space and removes Jesus from some of the direct opposition He had been facing from the scribes and Pharisees (although the opposition will continue).

The sea would have been a very familiar place for some of Jesus' disciples, Simon, Andrew, James, and John, since they made their careers as fishermen. While Jesus would have been able to use some of their skills (and maybe their boat?) in this phase of His ministry, we can't forget that Jesus called them to be something more, "fishers of men" (Mark 1:17).

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a great crowd followed – Now that Jesus is well underway in His ministry, Mark describes that He attracts a crowd of people. This had already been foreshadowed by the way people came to Simon's house in Capernaum (Mark 1:33), how everyone was looking for Him (Mark 1:37), how He could not openly enter a town (Mark 1:45), how they filled a house to overflowing (Mark 2:4), and how a crowd came to Him at the sea when He called Levi (Mark 2:13). Jesus isn't playing to the crowd. His purpose is not to gain popularity, but in His ministry He is drawing the attention of many. Mark depicts the crowd as somewhat neutral. They are not like the Pharisees, scribes, and Herodians who are against Him, but they also are not given the same characteristics of the disciples.

When the great crowd heard all that He was doing – The main motive for the movement of the crowd is that they have heard about Jesus' actions. While it would probably be short-sighted to think that His preaching/teaching was not also a thing that drew the crowd to Jesus, Mark does highlight that it was Jesus' actions (healing and casting out demons/unclean spirits) that really made the impact on the people. Actions do speak louder than words.

to have a boat ready for Him – Practically speaking, a boat would allow Jesus to create some distance between Himself and the crowd, which was necessary because they were pressing in against Him. It would also allow Jesus to gather in front of the crowd and speak to them. The boat is a "mobile pulpit" of sorts while the shoreline could create a mini-amphitheater which would allow for natural acoustics to support Jesus' preaching.

lest they crush Him – This is not necessarily to ascribe ill-motives to the crowd, but just what happens when so many people want to see Jesus, they keep pushing in on one another to get closer to Him and end up crushing Jesus too.

so that all who had diseases pressed around Him to touch him. – This is an interesting spin on the crowd's reaction to Jesus and the desire of many to be healed. In previous stories of healing, Jesus had used physical touch to bring healing to people (Simon's mother-in-law (Mark 1:31) and the leper (Mark 1:41), but Mark has also placed considerable focus on Jesus healing by His Word alone (Mark 1:24; 2:5, 11; 3:5). But in this instance, it's not just that people want to hear Jesus, they desire to touch Him, with the hopes that their diseases will also be healed. This aspect of Jesus' ministry will come up again in Mark 5:25-34 and 6:56.

And whenever the unclean spirits saw Him – Mark is not completely consistent in his terminology. He uses the phrase "unclean spirits" in Mark 1:27, 3:11, 5:13, and 6:7, but also refers to demon(s) or demon-possession many more times (Mark 1:32, 34, 39; 3:15, 22; 5:15-16, 18; 6:13; 7:26, 29-30; 9:38; and 16:9 and 17). Demon possession is treated as a distinct issue from the various illnesses people were suffering.

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they fell down before Him – In this case, falling down before Jesus is not a sign of true worship, but rather a recognition of Jesus' authority over them. The irony is that others have recognized Jesus' authority (Mark 1:21, 27; 2:10), but have not always responded in a similar way. Jesus' authority was seen, questioned, and even challenged by people, but the demons can only recognize it and shudder.

Jas. 2:19 ESV You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe-- and shudder!

"You are the Son of God." – These words are absolutely true. Just as when the unclean spirit declared Jesus the Holy One of God (Mark 1:24), thereby validating Jesus' Baptism when the Holy Spirit descended on Him (Mark 1:9) and the Father called Jesus His Son. One major strand of Jesus' identity is the recognition that He truly is the Son of God.

Mk. 1:11 ESV And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

Mk. 1:1 ESV ¶ The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Mk. 9:7 ESV And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him."

Mk. 14:61-62 ESV But he remained silent and made no answer. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" ⁶² And Jesus said, "I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven."

Mk. 15:39 ESV And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!"

he strictly ordered them not to make him known – This is a return to Mark 1:23-26, when Jesus is in a synagogue teaching and an unclean spirit declares Jesus' identity. In both cases the rebuke to be silent is given precisely because it is an agent of Satan who is proclaiming Jesus' identity. Jesus' purpose in coming is not merely to be known, but to be known by faith as the Savior of the people. This is not the proclamation of the demons nor their purpose in identifying Him. Jesus' goal is not that no one would know who He is. The whole context of this story would disprove that, for here He has come to speak to a large crowd of people from all over the neighboring areas of Galilee. When Jesus healed a leper in Mark 1:40ff., He also told the man to tell no one, but Jesus' command was not that this man should never tell anyone, but that he first must go to the priest to be declared clean and that he would be a proof to the priests of Jesus' power and authority.

Mk. 1:25 ESV But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!"

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Mk. 1:34 ESV And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons. And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

Neither Jesus nor Mark explain why Jesus silences the demons on these numerous occasions, but within the context of the Gospel story, it is not appropriate that demons would be the heralds of Jesus' identity and mission. John is given that holy task in the beginning of the Gospel (John 1:3ff.; 11:30-32). The unclean spirits/demons obviously stand against Jesus, but by now we also know the Pharisees/scribes and Herodians have also chosen to oppose Him. The disciples (consisting of fishermen, tax collectors and other sinners (Mark 2:15) are following Jesus and so is this crowd of people from all over the lands surrounding Galilee. But do the people really know who Jesus is and what He has come to do?

Mark 3:7-12 – A Transition and a Foretaste of What is to Come!

Jesus moves to the sea which is no longer as a place to call disciples, but where disciples will act as participants in Jesus' mission (Mark 3:13-14)

Jesus' popularity (Mark 1:36) is reaching new heights, emphasized by the fact that Jesus is sought out by people quite distant from Galilee (Mark 3:7-8) and Jesus' own turn toward people other than regular Jewish people (Mark 2:17), such as the demoniac among the tombs (Mark 5:1-20) and the Syro-Phoenician woman (Mark 7:24-30).

The function of a boat in Jesus' ministry will become commonplace up until Mark 8:14 and several key stories will relate to it. One scholar has likened Mark's Gospel to Homer's *Odyssey*, in which roughly the first half of the story revolves around the sea, while the second half revolves around the master (Odysseus) returning to his domain (cf. Jesus in Mark 11:15-17 and 12:1-11).

The description of Jesus being so pressed upon and people actually desiring to touch Him for healing will come back in much greater detail in the story of the woman with flow of blood (Mark 5:25-34) and highlights the proximity of Jesus in His divinity, that God has come near to all.

The return of demons speaking to Jesus (cf. Mark 1:23-28) will come into play immediately as people try to understand His identity and His interactions with the demons (Mark 3:22-27). That the demons give way to Jesus is a sign of His power and mastery over them, but doesn't Satan also have mastery over his own?

The hiddenness of Jesus' identity and mission will come into greater focus and Jesus Himself does have a role to play in this theme not just in silencing the demons, but also in speaking in parables in order to conceal the truth from people (Mark 4:11-12). Yet Jesus' openness and public actions are in no way limited.