

MARK

A Theological Commentary for Preachers

Abraham Kuruvilla



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MARK
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To my colleagues
in the
Department of Pastoral Ministries
Dallas Theological Seminary

who teach their students
ἵνα ὦσιν μετ' [Ἰησοῦ]
καὶ ἵνα ἀποστέλλῃ αὐτοὺς κηρύσσειν

*(that they may be with [Jesus],
and that He may send them to preach)*

Mark 3:14

PERICOPE 4

Who Is the Disciple?

Mark 3:7–35

[Disciples Commissioned; Relatives Seek and Scribes Accuse Jesus]

REVIEW, SUMMARY, PREVIEW

Review of Pericope 3: Mark 2:1–3:6 demonstrates the opposition disciples can expect, and how it may be faced—with boldness and persistence—as Jesus did.

Summary of Pericope 4: This pericope (3:7–35) carries on the story from Pericope 1 (1:21–45). A reminder of the incomprehension of some who seek Jesus only for existential benefits (3:7–12) raises the question of who exactly is *for* Jesus. The rest of the pericope answers that question. Disciples are appointed by the divine authority of Jesus to be with him and then to be sent from him in the extension of his mission in the service of God’s kingdom. The subsequent Markan “sandwich” expounds on the identity of the disciple by defining a disciple as an “insider” who, discerning Jesus’ person, does the will of God—being with Jesus and then being sent by him to engage in his work in the world for the kingdom of God. This is the one who is *for* Jesus.

Preview of Pericope 5: The next pericope (4:1–34) explains the responsibility of the disciple in the process of bearing fruit in discipleship (being receptive to the word of God), and details, as well, the divine element in such fruit production.

4 Mark 3:7–35

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS OF PERICOPE 4

4 Disciples are those who are “insiders” with Jesus, doing the will of God as authoritatively commissioned by Jesus—remaining with him and being sent by him to extend his mission (3:7–35).

- 4.1 Disciples—all who follow Jesus on the way—are those who are authoritatively appointed by him, to be with him and also to be sent by him to extend his own mission, unlike those who do not recognize his authority, or seek Jesus for the wrong reasons (3:7–19).
 - 4.1.1 They are not disciples who follow Jesus for the wrong reasons, not recognizing his authority or understanding his mission.
 - 4.1.2 The making of disciples in any generation is a momentous and authoritative appointment by Jesus.
 - 4.1.3 Disciples are appointed to be with Jesus and to be sent by him to extend his mission.
- 4.2 Disciples—“insiders” with Jesus—are those who do the will of God, not like “outsiders” who fail to discern Jesus’ authority (3:20–35).
 - 4.2.1 Genetic proximity to Jesus, while disregarding his authority, has nothing to do with “insidership.”
 - 4.2.2 Physical or ecclesiastical proximity to Jesus, while disregarding his authority, has nothing to do with “insidership.”
 - 4.2.3 “Insidership” with Jesus, the status of the disciple, has to do with obedience to the will of God.

OVERVIEW

THE PERICOPE OPENS WITH a summary (3:7–12) that recapitulates the story preceding it. It harks back to the popularity of Jesus described in 1:21–45. But this opening summary also looks forward to what follows. The crowds are still following him, looking for what Jesus has to offer in terms of healing of disease and alleviation of affliction: they are following him for the wrong reasons. The demons who actually recognize Jesus are shushed to preclude any misapprehension of Jesus by the populace as a “miracle man” to whom they could come to find redress for grievance and relief from woe. The reader is beginning to wonder: If everyone is after Jesus for ulterior motives, is there anybody at all who is truly *for* Jesus and for his mission, understanding who he is and what he is about? Had no one understood what it means to follow him? This is the question that the pericope answers: What does it mean to be *for* Jesus? Who is *for* him?

4.1 Mark 3:7–19

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS 4.1

- 4.1 Disciples—all who follow Jesus on the way—are those who are authoritatively appointed by him, to be with him and also to be sent by him to extend his own mission, unlike those who do not recognize his authority, or seek Jesus for the wrong reasons (3:7–19).
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 - 4.1.2 The making of disciples in any generation is a momentous and authoritative appointment by Jesus.
 - 4.1.3 Disciples are appointed to be with Jesus and to be sent by him to extend his mission.

ACT I: IN GALILEE

Section Summary 4.1: The context is set up in the first few verses of this pericope, recapitulating the earlier adulatory activities of the crowd and the imposition of silence upon the unclean spirits. In the process of defining who the disciple is, the authoritative commissioning of Jesus' followers is described, along with the role of disciples: they are to be with their leader, and they are to be sent by him to extend his own mission.

TRANSLATION 4.1

- 3:7 *And Jesus withdrew to the sea with His disciples, and a large multitude from Galilee followed, and from Judea,*
3:8 *and from Jerusalem, and from Idumea, and beyond the Jordan, and around Tyre and Sidon—a great multitude, hearing all what He was doing, came to Him.*
3:9 *And He told His disciples that a boat be stood ready for Him because of the crowd, so that they would not crush Him;*
3:10 *for He healed many, so that whoever had afflictions fell upon Him, in order to touch Him.*
3:11 *And the unclean spirits, whenever they saw Him, were falling before Him and crying, saying, “You are the Son of God!”*
3:12 *And He was earnestly warning them so that they would not make Him known.*
3:13 *And He went up on the mountain and summoned those He Himself wanted, and they came away to Him.*
3:14 *And He appointed Twelve, whom He also named apostles, so that they would be with Him, and so that He could send them to preach*
3:15 *and to have authority to cast out demons.*
3:16 *And He appointed the Twelve: to Simon He gave the name Peter,*
3:17 *and James, [the son] of Zebedee, and John the brother of James (and He also gave them the name “Boanerges,” which is “Sons of Thunder”),*
3:18 *and Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James [the son] of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Zealot,*
3:19 *and Judas Iscariot, who also gave Him over.*

NOTES 4.1

4.1.1 *They are not disciples who follow Jesus for the wrong reasons, not recognizing his authority and misunderstanding his mission.*

As before, the crowds come, one and all, seeking only the healing and exorcism Jesus provides; unlike in 1:21–45, in this section Jesus' teaching is not mentioned at all—it is all about the crowd's finding existential satisfaction. Subtle deprecatory tones are struck in this chord: having heard of “all what He was doing” (3:8), the crowd “falls upon” Jesus (or “presses upon,” ἐπιπίπτειν, *epipiptein*, 3:10), while the unclean spirits prostrate themselves, “falling before” him (προσέπιπτον, *prosepipton*, 3:11). Both

PERICOPE 4: Who Is the Disciple?

crowds and demons seem to be doing the same thing—falling upon/before Jesus. That is definitely not a positive commentary on the crowd's response to Jesus. Ironically, it is the demons who identify Jesus correctly as "Son of God," while the crowds are never said to do so.¹ With that note, and in this third chapter of the Gospel, it is certainly time for the reader to ask if anyone at all is *for* Jesus. The rest of the pericope endeavors to answer this question. First, the Twelve are selected from among the larger congregation of enthusiasts enchanted by Jesus' supernatural powers, and their commission is formalized (see below, on 3:13–19). Then, in the subsequent "sandwich" episode (3:20–35), the answer is conclusively given as to what constitutes a disciple, an answer that also expands the circle of disciples beyond the Twelve.

4.1.2 *The making of disciples in any generation is a momentous and authoritative appointment by Jesus.*

The mountaintop calling of the Twelve (3:13) is reminiscent of Moses' trip up Mt. Sinai and the Israelites covenanting with God (Exod 19) in the middle of their wilderness experience—between the exodus event and the Promised Land. Jesus and his disciples, similarly, live "between God's active intervention in the world, specifically in the person of Jesus, and the 'promised land' of God's coming kingdom."² All those who follow Jesus in this age are in the season of the already-but-not-yet.

In light of the allusions to Moses and his encounter with God on Mt. Sinai (Exod 19:1–12), the "mountain" here in Mark 3:13 has symbolic connotations of "the place where heaven and earth meet and where a holy man encounters God and the people receive revelation."³ This event in Mark 3 is the enactment of a "new Sinai covenant" on the mountain, a formal appointment of the disciples to follow the One who is at least as authoritative as Moses, on a journey at least as critical as the one to the Promised Land in Moses' day. However, the analogy breaks down, for in Exodus 19 it is Yahweh who calls Moses to himself, while in Mark 3 it is Jesus who sovereignly calls disciples to himself. This Jesus, hereby equated with Yahweh, is far greater than Moses.

1. "Son" as applied to Jesus (excluding "Son of Man") is found in several locations in the Gospel: "beloved [or only] Son" (1:11; 9:7; 12:6), "the Son" (13:32), "Son of God," (3:11; 15:39), "Son of the Most High God" (5:7), and "Son of the Blessed One" (14:61). Discounting this last occurrence, where the title is used skeptically, only one of the other references is found on human lips: 15:39, the centurion's exclamation. The imposition to silence, here in 3:12, reflects the incompleteness of the revelation of Jesus' person; only after his mission of suffering has been revealed (in Act II) will Jesus' identity be allowed to be broadcast, lest he is followed for the wrong reasons.

2. Henderson, *Christology*, 80; also see 79–81.

3. Collins, *Mark*, 215. Also see 9:2 for the Transfiguration, another consequential event taking place upon a mountain. Boring notes that "He went up on the mountain" was a stock phrase occurring twenty-four times in the LXX; eighteen times it is found in the Pentateuch, where it is used mostly of Moses (Boring, *Mark*, 100).

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EXODUS 19:3 LXX	MARK 3:13
And Moses went up on the mountain of God and God called (ἐκάλεσεν, <i>ekalesen</i>) him.	And He went up [= <i>Jesus as Moses</i>] on the mountain and He summoned (προσκαλεῖται, <i>proskaleitai</i>) those He wanted. [= <i>Jesus as God</i>]

Jesus' appointment of the Twelve in Mark 3:14, 16 employs a verb used for the appointment of priests (ποιέω, *poiēō*, 1 Kgs 12:31; 13:33 LXX) and that of Moses and Aaron (1 Sam 12:6 LXX). The verb is also used in Mark 1:17 in Jesus' declaration that he would "make" his disciples fishers of men. This is certainly an authoritative appointment of great moment.

In keeping with the announcement of the fulfillment of time and the nearness of the kingdom of God (1:15), and with the numerous exodus-evocative allusions—the "way" of Jesus that begins in the wilderness, the forty-day motif (1:1–20), and the commissioning of the disciples in this pericope—the number "twelve" (3:14, 16) is surely hinting at the twelve tribes as representing the wholeness of the community of Israel and its eschatological reconstitution (Ezek 47:13; also Sir 36.11, 23). For the Israelite audience, to whom Jesus primarily ministered in his earthly life, this mountaintop event is symbolic of the creation of a new "Israel." In the context of the arrival of God's kingdom, this tribal number indicates the creation afresh of a community of God's people who choose to follow Jesus on the way into that kingdom. Clearly the number is symbolic, for many of the Twelve are known only by their presence on this roster. "Their number and their corporate identity were more important to tradition than any individual profile."⁴ The theological thrust, therefore, goes beyond the actual twelve men, and indicates the constitution of a new people of God. Any and all who answer the call of Jesus to follow him on the Trip of Discipleship are, in a sense, included in the "twelve."

Substantiating that conclusion is the fact that the Twelve are themselves included in the larger company of the "disciples"; for instance, in 10:32, the Twelve are part of the disciples—"those who followed Him [Jesus]." In fact, the Twelve do not even appear to be the core of this larger body of Jesus-followers: at the raising of Jairus's daughter (5:37), at the Transfiguration (9:2–8), during the apocalyptic discourse (13:3–4), and in Gethsemane (14:32–42), a smaller group of three or four selected out of the Twelve becomes prominent. "Though the narratives of the call and commissioning of the Twelve are important in the structure of Mark, their main function seems to be to symbolize the nature of discipleship."⁵ This call by Jesus is for *all* who would follow him (as the definition of "disciple" later in the pericope, corroborates).

4. France, *Gospel of Mark*, 158–59. This, of course, is not to deny that there were twelve men called by Jesus, but it is to suggest that the choice of that number was also likely symbolic on Jesus' part.

5. Donahue and Harrington, *Gospel of Mark*, 126–27. Also see the Preface for a discussion of this issue.

4.1.3 *Disciples are appointed to be with Jesus and to be sent by him to extend his mission.*

The disciples are appointed to be “with Him” (μετ’ αὐτοῦ, *met autou*) and to be sent out by Jesus (3:14). Here is a curious paradox—they are appointed to be with him *and* to be sent out from him.⁶ They are to experience Jesus’ proximity and exercise Jesus’ authority as they are sent away from him to preach and exorcise. Indeed, one might say that only if one is “with” Jesus can one be sent “from/by” him. The first is a prerequisite for the second. Remaining in his presence is essential if one is to participate in the extension of Jesus’ mission. In other words, as followers become companions, companions become participants in the mission of Jesus, extending his work, taking on Jesus’ own role of preaching and exorcising—they become disciples. Jesus’ personal purpose, stated in 1:38 (“Let *us* go . . . so that *I* may preach”—note the singular for the verb of purpose), is now beginning to be shared with the disciples (*they* were now being sent to preach)—the training has begun!⁷ Indeed, after 1:39, Jesus is not recorded in Mark as preaching. The baton has been passed on. And the baton will be passed on again, to future generations of readers of the Gospel who choose to become disciples.⁸

4.2 Mark 3:20–35

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS 4.2

- 4.2 Disciples—“insiders” with Jesus—are those who do the will of God, not like “outsiders” who fail to discern Jesus’ authority (3:20–35).
- 4.2.1 Genetic proximity to Jesus, while disregarding his authority, has nothing to do with “insidership.”
- 4.2.2 Physical or ecclesiastical proximity to Jesus, while disregarding his authority, has nothing to do with “insidership.”
- 4.2.3 “Insidership” with Jesus, the status of the disciple, has to do with obedience to the will of God.

Section Summary 4.2: Mark’s first “sandwich” story is an eventful one, packed with ironic allusions as to the insider and outsider status of various groups of people. This episode builds upon the previous one where disciples were commissioned by

6. Both these elements of the disciples’ commission will show up again, later in the Gospel.

7. For the fulfillment of the commission by the Twelve, see 6:7–13, where they actually go out to perform those duties.

8. What elements of the commissioning of the Twelve are normative for the disciple today will be determined by the interpreter’s canonical and systematic theology. Most strands of Christendom would agree with the preaching mandate; not all would unite on the need to conduct exorcisms or exercise healing (as the Twelve did: 3:14, 15; see also 6:12–13). The fact that Jesus engages in both exorcisms and healings subsequent to the disciples’ commissioning, in contrast to the fact that he is never said to preach again in Mark, may be a hint as to what, in particular, the “baton” constitutes, and what exactly has been handed over to the responsibility of his followers. Notice those to whom the verb κηρύσσω (*kērussō*, “preach/proclaim”) is applied in this Gospel (other than Jesus in 1:14 and 1:38–39): John (1:4, 7), a leper (1:45), an ex-demoniac (5:20), a deaf-mute (7:36), the Twelve (3:14; 6:12), and the early church (13:10; 14:9)—all of whom fall into the category of “disciples” in Mark’s reckoning. On the other hand, exorcism and healing powers are not handed out so indiscriminately (in Mark, apart from Jesus and Twelve, only one other is said to have possessed the ability to exorcise, 9:38), suggesting a restriction of those ministries.

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Jesus to be “with him” and to be sent by him. Both Jesus’ family and the Jerusalem scribes represent “outsiders” who fail to recognize Jesus’ person (especially his authority). They are not “with him” and are starkly contrasted with the “insider,” the disciple who does the will of God—the one who is “with Jesus.”

TRANSLATION 4.2

- 3:20 *And He came in to the house, and the crowd came together again, so that they were not even able to eat bread.*
- 3:21 *And when His family heard [of this], they went out to seize Him, for they were saying, “He is out of His mind.”*
- 3:22 *And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, “He has Beelzebul,” and “By the ruler of the demons, He casts out demons.”*
- 3:23 *And summoning them, He was speaking to them in parables, “How is Satan able to cast out Satan?”*
- 3:24 *And if a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom is not able to stand.*
- 3:25 *And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand.*
- 3:26 *And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he is not able to stand, but he has [come to] an end.*
- 3:27 *But no one is able to enter into the house of the strong man to plunder his property unless he first binds the strong man, and then he will plunder his house.*
- 3:28 *Truly, I say to you that all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they may blaspheme;*
- 3:29 *but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit does not have forgiveness eternally, but is guilty of an eternal sin”—*
- 3:30 *because they were saying, “He has an unclean spirit.”*
- 3:31 *And His mother and His brothers came, and standing outside, they sent for Him and called Him.*
- 3:32 *And a crowd was sitting around Him, and they said to Him, “Behold, your mother and Your brothers are seeking You outside.”*
- 3:33 *And answering them, He said, “Who are My mother and My brothers?”*
- 3:34 *And looking around at those sitting around Him in a circle, He said, “Behold My mother and My brothers.*
- 3:35 *For whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother.”*

NOTES 4.2

This unit is the first of six classic, well-accepted “sandwich” stories in Mark—a literary arrangement with one story intercalated into another, giving the narrative the structure of a bipartite outer story and a single inner story.⁹ Here 3:20–21 and 3:31–35

9. See Edwards, “Markan Sandwiches”; and Shepherd, *Markan Sandwich Stories* for excellent accounts of this literary feature in Mark’s Gospel. The other five obvious “sandwiches” in Mark are located in 5:20–43; 6:7–32; 11:12–25; 14:1–11; and 14:53–72. The outer and inner stories are usually “mutually illuminating,” as will be seen (France, *Gospel of Mark*, 19).

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form the two halves of the outer story, and 3:22–30 the inner story. Both stories are centered on the “house” in relation to which some are inside and others outside; notice also the “house” divided on itself (3:25, 27).¹⁰ As with most of these “sandwiches,” the only character common to both stories is Jesus. Indeed, the symmetrical way in which the characters are introduced centers upon (and is bookended at either end by) the protagonist of the story.¹¹

- A **Jesus** (3:20a)
- B Crowd (3:20b)
- C Relatives (3:21)
- D Scribes (3:22)
- Jesus** (3:23–29)
- D' Scribes (3:30)
- C' Relatives (3:31)
- B' Crowd (3:32)
- A' **Jesus** (3:33–35)

Two discrete groups approach the house: the family of Jesus and the scribes from Jerusalem. Apparently they are on different errands, but with the same goal: to oppose Jesus. The “sandwich” technique in this unit compares the parallel charges brought against Jesus—by his family (accusation of madness, 3:21) and by the scribes (accusation of demonic control, 3:22, 30).¹²

Mark 3:20–35 forms the “sandwich” proper; however a better feel for the theological thrust is obtained if one visualizes the structure of the entire section of 3:7–4:1. Notice the symmetrical layout of the “insiders” and “outsiders” (in bold).¹³

- Narrative Summary:* Large crowds (πολύς, polys); boat (3:7–12)
- A Those “with” Jesus—disciples (3:13–20) [ποιέω, poieō, “appoint,” 3:14] **Insiders: Twelve**
 - Narrative Foil:* Crowd (3:20)
 - B Those accusing Jesus of madness—family (3:21) **Outsiders: Family**
 - C Those accusing Jesus of demonic control—scribes (3:22–30) **Outsiders: Scribes**
 - B' Those sending for and calling Jesus—family (3:31) **Outsiders: Family**
 - Narrative Foil:* Crowd (3:32)
 - A' Those “around” Jesus—“inner circle” (3:33–35) [ποιέω, “do,” 3:35] **Insiders: Anyone**
 - Narrative Summary:* Large crowds (πλεῖστος, pleistos, superlative of πολύς); boat (4:1)

10. Perhaps Mark’s readers would have been aware of the fragmentation of the kingdom and household of Herod the Great after his demise in 4 BCE. They might also have recalled that the downfall of Herod Antipas began with his defeat at the hands of the stronger army of the Nabatean king Aretas (Josephus, *Ant.* 5.1), not to mention the fractures within the “house” of Roman imperial power with the death of Nero. See Donahue and Harrington, *Gospel of Mark*, 130–31.

11. Shepherd, *Markan Sandwich Stories*, 111–38, discusses 3:20–35 in detail.

12. The family of Jesus is not shown in a good light in this Gospel. They “remain for Mark completely outside the Jesus movement, as at best skeptical onlookers. . . . If it were not for 6:3 [and, perhaps, 15:40, 47; and 16:1] a reader of Mark would not even know the names of any of Jesus’ natural family” (France, *Gospel of Mark*, 164).

13. Modified from van Iersel, “Concentric Structures,” 94.

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Strikingly, there is no description of the responses of the family members (who are “snubbed” by Jesus) or of the Jerusalem scribes (who are condemned by him); they make no replies to Jesus. This episode, therefore, is rather static, and “not so much a narrative as a tableau, enabling us to see graphically the contrast between insiders and outsiders.”¹⁴ Also note that those “with” Jesus (3:14) are parallel with those “around” Jesus (3:34)—the insiders (both groups of people are related to the word ποιέω; “to appoint,” 3:14; “to do,” 3:35). In other words, the insiders “doing” the will of God are disciples who are “appointed” to be with Jesus. Outsiders, on the other hand, are those who are *not* with him; they do not fall into the “disciple” category.

4.2.1 Genetic proximity to Jesus, while disregarding his authority, has nothing to do with “insidership.”

The first outer slice of the “sandwich” (3:20–21):

- The disciples come inside the house with Jesus (indicated by the plural: “they were not even able to eat,” 3:20)—disciples are *physically* inside the house.
- Because they are with Jesus morally (μετ’ αὐτοῦ, *met autou*, 3:14), they are *morally* “insiders.”
- Jesus’ family (οἱ παρ’ αὐτοῦ, *hoi par autou*, literally “those of Him,” 3:21) go “out” (ἐξῆλθον, *exēlthon*, 3:21; note the prefix ἐξ, *ex*, “out-”) to seize him—the family are *physically* outside.
- And their accusation is that Jesus is “out” of his mind (ἐξέστη, *exestē*, 3:21, with the prefix ἐξ again)—Jesus is accused of being *morally* “outside.” The family’s use of κρατέω (*krateō*, “seize,” 3:21) is also significant; it always has negative connotations in Mark (6:17; 12:12; 14:1, 44, 46, 49, 51), except when Jesus is the subject doing the seizing (1:31; 5:41; 9:27). The hostile actions of Jesus’ family indicate that they are not on the “inside” with Jesus.¹⁵

The irony is that the ones *genetically* “inside” (the family Jesus shares genes with) are *physically* outside; and, accusing Jesus of being “outside,” it is they themselves who are *morally* “outside” in relation to the Jesus “circle.” The second outer slice of the “sandwich” (3:31–35) confirms this diagnosis of the family’s moral location:

- Jesus’ family are said to be “standing outside” (ἔξω στήκοντες, *exō stēkontes*, 3:31)—they are *physically* outside. The forward position of ἔξω (“outside”) further emphasizes the family’s “outsider” status—this despite being *genetically* “inside” with Jesus.
- The family is again described as being outside, seeking Jesus (ἔξω, 3:32).¹⁶

14. France, *Gospel of Mark*, 178.

15. Shepherd, *Markan Sandwich Stories*, 122. Interestingly, all of Jesus’ actions employing κρατέω are healings.

16. As well, the family’s “seeking” has a deprecatory tone (as the verb ζητέω, *zēteō*, almost always does in this Gospel: 8:11, 12; 11:18; 1:12; 14:1, 11, 55), rendering their activities inimical to Jesus’ mission (see also under 1:32–39).

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- The irony goes further: the family “sends” and “calls” for Jesus—ἀποστέλλω (*apostellō*) and καλέω (*kaleō*) are key words in the commissioning activity of Jesus (1:20; 2:17; 3:14; 6:7). It is he who alone has the authority to send and call; but here we see these “outsiders” daring to send for and call Jesus.

In sum, the family of Jesus, those whom one expects to be inside (and inside they are, *genetically*), turn out to be outside *physically*, but even more important, outside *morally*. They fail to recognize Jesus’ person (unlike the demons in 3:11), and thus disregard his authority. They are not “with” Jesus, and they are certainly not disciples.

4.2.2 *Physical or ecclesiastical proximity to Jesus, while disregarding his authority, has nothing to do with “insidership.”*

Mark clearly points to the origin of the scribes—they are from Jerusalem (3:22). One would assume that they, coming from this hub of religious activity where the temple was located, would be “insiders.” The reader may safely deduce, from the dialogue the scribes have with Jesus in this inner story (3:22–30), that they are physically inside the house. There they are, *physically* inside with Jesus, and presumably, being religious functionaries, *morally* inside as well. However, their openly hostile charge of Jesus being under demonic control gives lie to that presumption.

The scribes lay on Jesus two accusations; he responds to each, in reverse order.¹⁷

A	Accusation 1 (3:22a)	<i>His deeds are in the power of Beelzebul!</i>
B	Accusation 2 (3:22b)	<i>He casts out demons by ruler of demons!</i>
C	Jesus’ statement on Satan (3:23–26)	
B’	Response to Accusation 2 (3:27)	<i>Satan does not cast out Satan!</i>
A’	Response to Accusation 1 (3:28–30)	<i>My deeds are in the power of the Holy Spirit!</i>

The scribes’ allegation is that Jesus’ exorcisms, rather than being empowered by the Holy Spirit, were being performed under the control of Satan—“a total perversion of the truth and a repudiation of the rule of God,” an arrant rejection of the saving grace and power of God. There can be no forgiveness for this outright repudiation—indeed, such an attitude makes forgiveness impossible.¹⁸ That this is the issue is underscored by the narrator’s explanatory tag that concludes the section: “. . . because they were saying, ‘He has an unclean spirit’” (3:30). It must be remembered that it is the Holy Spirit who had initiated the first confrontation with Satan in 1:12; the same Spirit is implicitly responsible for the ministry of Jesus (3:29), a fact that the scribes refuse to acknowledge, instead attributing Jesus’ works to satanic influence.¹⁹ Theirs is an utter denial of the work of God in Jesus. They, too, disregarded Jesus’ authority.

17. Harrington, *Mark*, 43.

18. France, *Gospel of Mark*, 177; Witherington, *Gospel of Mark*, 159; Stein, *Mark*, 187. Rabbinic polemical literature continued the accusation of demonic activity in Jesus: *b. Sanh.* 43a, 107b; see Justin Martyr, *Dial.* 69; Origen, *Cels.* 1.6.

19. France, *Gospel of Mark*, 174. The verb δύναμαι (*dynamai*, “is able”) occurs five times in rapid succession: “How is Satan *able* to cast out Satan?”; “a kingdom is not *able* to stand”; “a house is not *able* to stand”; “Satan is not *able* to stand”; and “no one is *able* to enter the strong man’s house” (3:23–27).

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The inner story of the “sandwich” (3:22–30):

- The scribes are ostensibly “insiders” (from Jerusalem)—*ecclesiastically* “inside.”²⁰
- They are within the house arguing with Jesus—*physically* inside.
- Accusing Jesus of being in league with Satan, and of casting “out” demons by Satan (note the verbal prefix derived from ἐξ [ex] in ἐκβάλλω, *ekballō*, “cast out,” 3:22, 23), they imply Jesus is *morally* “outside” (just as his relatives accused him of being “out” of his mind, ἐξέστη, *exestē*, 3:21).
- Jesus counters, accusing the scribes of blasphemy, and declaring forgiveness for them impossible—*they* are the ones *morally* cast out eternally.

In sum, Mark’s account of the inner piece of the tableau is filled with irony: the ones *ecclesiastically* “inside” and *physically* inside turn out to be *morally* “outside.” They too, like Jesus’ relatives, disregard his authority, and they too are not “with” Jesus! Disciples they are hardly! Who then, one wonders, is on the “inside” with Jesus? Who is *for* him?

4.2.3 “Insidership” with Jesus, the status of the disciple, has to do with obedience to the will of God.

Finally we get to the *real* “insiders”—those sitting “around Him in a circle” (περὶ αὐτὸν κύκλω, *peri auton kuklō*, 3:34).²¹ The question of what exactly constitutes “insidership” or “outsidership” is answered here: Jesus’ true/new family is made up of those who do the will of God. These are the ones who are *morally* “insiders” with Jesus—the inner circle. These are the ones who are “with” Jesus—his disciples. In contrast are those who not only fail to follow Jesus, but proactively take on an offensive stance of repudiating him, disregarding his authority—the relatives and scribes: those not “with” Jesus.²²

The location of these insiders (περὶ αὐτὸν κύκλω, *peri auton kyklō*, “around Him in a circle,” 3:34) is parallel to the station of the disciples (μετ’ αὐτοῦ, *met autou*, “with Him,” 3:14).²³ Not only does this parallelism again equate “insiders” with those who are appointed to be “with” Jesus (i.e., disciples), it also indicates the broadening of the circle. It is not just the Twelve alone who are in the coterie of insiders, but *anyone* who does the will of God: “insiders” (the new family of Jesus) includes all those who

The only one who is “able” is Jesus—his power is great indeed: by binding the ὁ ἰσχυρός (*ho ischyros*, “the strong man”), it is he who is the stronger one (ὁ ἰσχυρότερός, *ho ischyroteros*, as John the Baptist described Jesus in 1:7). Satan’s kingdom is coming under siege—not by an internal demonic enemy, but by an external divine one, working in the power of the Holy Spirit. See Busch, “Questioning and Conviction,” 493.

20. “Ecclesiastically” is, of course, anachronistic here, but conveys the sense of officialdom, indicating those who were professionally and habitually handling the things of God.

21. These, though part of the “crowd,” are clearly distinguished from that larger body, which in its anonymous and nondescript character simply serves as a narrative foil in the Gospel.

22. France, *Gospel of Mark*, 164.

23. In fact, 4:10 employs the same wording as does 3:34, including the Twelve in that particular group: οἱ περὶ αὐτὸν σὺν τοῖς δώδεκα (*hoi peri auton syn tois dōdeka*, “those around Him with the Twelve”).

are “with” Jesus and who follow him “on the way,” doing the will of God—“the wider, and in principle indefinitely extendable, family.”²⁴ That Jesus uses deliberately inclusive language with his addition of “sister” (3:35, the only time in this “sandwich” where “sister” appears) suggests this extendability of “disciple”/“insider” beyond the confines of that historic circle. This addition is pointed, for neither Mark nor the crowd says anything about sisters searching for Jesus or coming for him in 3:31–33.²⁵ In other words, *anyone* who does the will of God is an “insider”—and such a one, who is “with Jesus,” is a disciple!

SERMON FOCUS AND OUTLINES

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS OF PERICOPE 4 FOR PREACHING

4 Disciples—insiders with Jesus—are those who do the will of God (3:20–35).

In contrast to outsiders who fail to recognize Jesus’ person and thus disregard his authority (his Lordship), insiders—those who do the will of God—are the true disciples. These are the ones who have authoritatively been appointed by Jesus to be with him and then to be sent by him to extend his mission in the world in the service of God’s kingdom (a dramatic and momentous commissioning that is not to be disparaged or disregarded). And to engage in this activity with all of one’s life is what it means to do the will of God. The way the story is told (see the chiasmic structure of 3:7—4:1 above), there is a clear equation of the following elements:

those appointed (ποιέω, *poieō*) to be with Jesus (and then to be sent by Jesus) [3:14]
 = disciples (“insiders”/the new family of Jesus) [3:34]
 = those who do (ποιέω) the will of God [3:35].

Or . . .

to do (ποιέω) the will of God [3:35]
 = to fulfill the role of the disciple (“insider”) [3:34]
 = to be with him (and then to be sent by him) as appointed (ποιέω) by Jesus [3:14].

The obedience of “insiders” (i.e., the Twelve and the spiritual family of Jesus) to the will of God and their remaining “with” Jesus is contrasted with the response of “outsiders” (i.e., the physical family of Jesus and the scribes from Jerusalem) who disregard his authority and fail to recognize his Lordship. This is one of first steps in the Trip of Discipleship—the submission to his authority and Lordship. That acknowledgement, evidenced in a life of obedience to the will of God, Mark tells us, is a key element of being a disciple—one who obeys the call to be with Jesus and to be sent out by him.

24. France, *Gospel of Mark*, 180.

25. The testosterone-partial *Gos. Thom.* 99, in recounting this pericope, omits “sister” (and also places “brother” before “mother”).

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POSSIBLE PREACHING OUTLINES FOR PERICOPE 4

- I. OUTSIDERS: Family and scribes
 - The outer story depicts the family's disregard for Jesus' authority—outsiders: 3:20–21, 31–32
 - The inner story depicts the scribes' disregard for Jesus' authority—outsiders: 3:22–30
 - Move-to-Relevance: ways we might wrongly assume we are insiders
- II. INSIDERS: Disciples
 - The definition of the disciple—insider: one doing the will of God: 3:33–35
 - The will of God: obedience to Jesus' commission of 3:14
- III. *Be an insider with Jesus: Do the will of God!*
 - Specific way(s) we can do the will of God, especially relating to Jesus' commission of 3:14

As with all narratives in Scripture, not every verse in this pericope needs to be attended to in detail in the sermon, neither does every exegetical/theological point raised in the notes above. The constraints of the audience (their circumstances and spirituality), the time available, the occasion of the preaching event, and the preacher's own style should dictate which parts of the text are highlighted. Expediently demonstrating the theology of the pericope (i.e., the authority of the text) and, thence, moving to application (i.e., the relevance of the text) should be the goal of the homiletician when preaching this and every other pericope.

Another way of looking at the pericope is to see the family of Jesus and the scribes from Jerusalem as representing “genes” and “status”—elements that, in the eyes of the world, privilege one before God. A correction to this misconception is made by the inspired text: it is obedience that privileges one, not pedigrees or taxonomies of power attained by virtue of birth, ancestry, vocation, wealth, etc.

- I. WORLD: “Genes and/or status in society/religion privileges one in God's eyes.”
 - Genes: Jesus' family disregards his authority: 3:20–21, 31–32
 - Status: The scribes disregard Jesus' authority: 3:22–30
 - Move-to-Relevance: ways we might wrongly assume we are privileged insiders
- II. GOD: “Doing my will privileges one in my eyes.”
 - Obedience to God's will is the mark of a disciple: 3:33–35
 - The will of God for the disciple: undertaking Jesus' commission to be with him and be sent: 3:14
- III. *Be privileged: Do the will of God!*
 - Specific way(s) we can do the will of God, especially relating to Jesus' commission of 3:14

The homiletical imperative in either outline is, admittedly, quite general. One will want to focus on obedience particularly to the elements of Jesus' commission of the disciples—to be with him and to be sent by him. Indeed, the preacher may want to focus primarily on one or the other these two, drawing out its importance in determining closeness to Jesus (“insidership”), as opposed to what the world considers as important in making one “spiritual.”