

# **First Serve**

---

Studies in the Gospel of Mark

Text

Mark 3:7-21

Topic

Jesus makes the choice of a dozen men  
to personally disciple

Title

*"The Maker's Dozen"*

## Introduction

Ever fear you were going to be crushed when in a large crowd?

*It happens more often than you might think.*

One study identified 215 such crushes taking place over a 30 year period. It showed that they occur most frequently at religious events, with sports, political and musical events coming in close behind.

The one you're probably most aware of, and have seen footage of, happened in 1989, when ninety-five people died in a crush at a soccer match at Hillsborough Stadium, in Sheffield, England.

This year, at least 1,470 people were crushed to death outside Mecca in the deadliest disaster on the annual hajj (Ḥaġġ) pilgrimage in a quarter of a century.

It's proven to be a death-March. The previous deadliest-ever incident at the annual hajj happened in 1990, when a stampede killed 1,426 people. Stampedes and crushes are a major danger at the hajj since it attracts more than 2 million pilgrims a year, all moving simultaneously in close quarters through a number of rituals over the course of five days.

**In verse nine we will see that Jesus was in danger of being crushed by a huge crowd that sought Him for healing.**

I've come to think that the potential crowd-crush may have been a satanic tactic to kill Jesus before He went to the Cross. Jesus countered, using a tactic of His own to be able to both stay safe, and go on setting free those held captive by the devil.

Once we get into our text, you'll see the verses are all about the confrontation between Jesus and Satan, describing their tactics and counter-tactics.

It prompted me to ask and want to answer the following two questions: #1 What Tactics Do You See The Devil Using To Whip His Captives?, and #2 What Tactics Do You See Jesus Using To Win The Captives?

#1 What Tactics Do You See The Devil Using To Whip His Captives?

(v7-12)

The remainder of Mark chapter three - all of it and not just the part we have time to study today - has a particular theme.

It is illustrated in verse twenty-seven. Jesus said,

Mar 3:27 No one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. And then he will plunder his house.

Satan is the "strong man;" his "house" is the world; his "goods" are human beings - the nonbelievers - that he holds captive.

Jesus likened His mission to "bind[ing] the strong man" so that He could set those captives free.

Let's see how it played out.

Mar 3:7 But Jesus withdrew with His disciples to the sea. And a great multitude from Galilee followed Him, and from Judea

Mar 3:8 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.

Mar 3:9 So He told His disciples that a small boat should be kept ready for Him because of the multitude, lest they should crush Him.

How big is a "multitude?" It was easily in the thousands, and more likely upwards of ten thousand. It was a throng, a mob, all pressing forward to "touch" Jesus. It started in Capernaum, forcing Jesus to head for the sea.

This was a scary crowd, comprised of very needy people. Since it was a first-come, first-served situation, you can see how, at any minute, things could get out of hand. The crowd threatened to throng Jesus, crushing Him.

Jesus was in way-worse danger of being trampled to death than WalMart employees when they open the doors on Black Friday.

The website "Black Friday Death Count" says the first WalMart death resulting from the post-Thanksgiving tradition came in 2008.

That's the year a seasonal associate was killed amid throngs of shoppers on Long Island. Just before the store's 5am opening, the associate was hit by a sliding glass door that fell as shoppers outside pressed against it. The cause of death was asphyxia, meaning he was essentially suffocated by the crowd

The text doesn't say it, but I can't help but think that this crowd might have been a satanic tactic to try to kill Jesus before He went to the Cross.

Jesus' counter-tactic was to "withdraw to the sea" and have a small boat ready for safety. The indication of the text is that Jesus walked along the shore, preaching and healing, but could quickly retreat into the boat if a crowd-crush started.

By the way - Our normal reaction to any danger we might face in ministry is to retreat from it. It makes sense - but it might not be the Lord's leading.

We need to keep the priority on ministering the Gospel, and discover the spiritual tactics to stay safe while advancing with it, not retreating.

[Mar 3:10](#) For He healed many, so that as many as had afflictions pressed about Him to touch Him.

We miss something in these verses on account of the translation into English. We especially need to understand the meaning of the word "afflictions."

We tend to think of it as describing garden variety physical ailments, but it's meaning is a little more sinister.

It is the translation of a word that means *to whip* or *to scourge*. It is describing afflictions that are the direct result of the devil's mastery over these people. He is portrayed as whipping them.

These, then, were diseases and conditions that were directly caused by Satan.

It is wrong to blame all sickness and suffering on the devil. But it is just as wrong to assume he does not cause a great deal of sickness and suffering.

Remember, this whole section is describing Jesus versus the strong man, plundering his house. As master of the house, these folks were whipped, scourged slaves.

Jesus healed them. How many of them, we cannot say. It seems, in this case at least, they needed to "touch" Him to receive healing.

Jesus was not led by His Father to simply say, to the multitude, "You're all healed." No, it was a one-on-one thing.

Jesus died for the sins of the whole world, but your salvation is a one-on-one thing. He died in **your** place, as **your** sacrifice, as **your** substitute.

There was another group in the multitude - those possessed by demons.

Mar 3:11 And the unclean spirits, whenever they saw Him, fell down before Him and cried out, saying, "You are the Son of God."  
Mar 3:12 But He sternly warned them that they should not make Him known.

An unclean spirit is a New Testament synonym, a more descriptive Jewish term, for a demon. The terms "unclean spirit" and "demon" seem to be interchangeable in Scripture. There is no clear difference in their definitions.

A demon is 'unclean' in that it is wicked. Evil spirits are not only wicked themselves, but they delight in wickedness and promote wickedness in humans.

These demons recognized Jesus as the "Son of God." They knew He was fully God, the Second Person of the trinity. He was their Creator, and had watched them fall as they joined with Satan in his rebellion.

Jesus had been healing all those who were whipped by the devil. This was a second group, a second wave, so to speak.

A common technique in movies that depict epic battles is to have a second enemy force arrive just when you thought you'd won the battle. In *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*, Theoden arrives with the riders of Rohan, turning the tide of the battle for the good guys. But just as you think victory is possible, a new enemy announced its presence, and more fierce fighting occurs.

These with "unclean spirits" were like that second wave. It was a counter-tactic of Satan's.

Their strategy was to announce the truth about Who Jesus really was.

Why rebuke them for telling the truth? Why silence them?

Because you don't want to be associated with liars who are telling some truth. Think of the cults as a good example. There is always some truth in their message; but it is surrounded by half-truths and outright lies.

We're not excited when a Mormon talks about Jesus Christ, because the Jesus they are revealing is not God come in human flesh. He is not the Jesus of Bible.

You don't go door-to-door with a Mormon sharing the Gospel.

Satan tried to defend his house, but his tactics failed. Jesus employed tactics of His own, and bound the strong man, setting the captives free.

It's at this point that people always wonder, "Why don't we see more demonic possession today? Why don't we attribute more afflictions to Satan?"

I think our emphasis on tactics and counter-tactics helps answer that question. When Jesus was on the earth, in the first century, the devil had fewer tactics at his disposal.

If maybe not fewer, just different.

One example would be the current scourge of pornography. Don't get me wrong; there has always been pornography.

I remember Pastor Don McClure pointing out that much of what is considered great art is really just pornographic images.

But today, you've got to understand that pornography is proliferating as never before in history.

It's so rampant, so readily available, that *Playboy* magazine recently announced a major change. *Playboy* will no longer publish nude photographs of women, the New York Times reported in an article quoting Scott Flanders, the company's chief executive.

"You're now one click away from every sex act imaginable for free," Flanders was quoted as saying in the Times. "And so it's just passe at this juncture."

In other words, there is so much porn, so readily available for free, that *Playboy* needs to reinvent itself in order to survive.

Why waste a demon, or several, or a legion, on demonic possession, when you can enslave millions of men and women through the modern proliferation of pornography, which they choose for themselves?

Why afflict people with illnesses when they are destroying their own lives more at a much deeper spiritual level?

It would be a waste of resources.

That's why we need to ask, "What tactics do we see the devil using to whip people?" He's not stuck in the first century; neither can we afford to be, in our understanding of his wiles.



While we sit around wondering why more people aren't possessed, the devil is gaining captives, one click at a time.

Whatever the devil is using as a whip, as a scourge, we can discover a counter-tactic, with the Lord's help, and go on presenting the Gospel.

This tactical approach to the long war between God and Satan also helps me to understand why we see fewer healings, and fewer miracles in general. It's because the age in which we live is a time when folks are being reached more through our weakness, through our frailty, through our persevering through sufferings.

It isn't miracles that reveal we are telling the truth about Jesus. It is our transformed lives, and our submission to God, and the sufficiency of His grace, in our darkest times.

Those held captive by the devil today, by the tactics he is using, don't need to see a miracle. They need to see **we are the miracle** - born-again, forgiven of our sins, decreasing so that Jesus might increase.

## #2 What Tactics Do You See Jesus Using To Win The Captives?

(v13-21)

We noted the specific tactics Jesus used in the encounter with the multitudes sent from Satan:

- He changed His location, moving the field of battle to the sea shore, in order to gain the tactical advantage.
- He silenced the unclean spirits, so as to not discredit the source of His power.

In verses thirteen through twenty-one we will see the things that are more general - the tactics that stand the test of time and assure us of victory in this long war with evil.

Mar 3:13 And He went up on the mountain and called to Him those He Himself wanted. And they came to Him.

Luke's Gospel records that Jesus first spent all night in prayer. There is no more important tactic than prayer.

In His case, the Father revealed to Jesus a plan to keep Satan on the run and to win his captives. It was to "call to Him" a small group of men to disciple, who would then disciple others.

Mar 3:14 Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach,

Mar 3:15 and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons:

"Twelve" can be found in 187 places in God's word. Revelation alone has 22 occurrences of the number.

Twelve meant something to these disciples. Jacob (Israel) had twelve sons, each of which represented a tribe. Ishmael, who was born to Abraham through Hagar, also had twelve tribes.

They would understand from the number twelve that they were the foundation for establishing the government of the kingdom of God on the earth.

First they must "be with Him." They had already been with Jesus, called to follow Him. This was something different, something deeper.

It's been said, and it's true, that every disciple is a Christian, but not every Christian is a disciple. It's a way of capturing the thought that we can hold back, slack-off, slumber, in the midst of the battle.

Prayed-up disciples next need to be sent out "to preach." Our main tactic is to present the Gospel. We are told elsewhere that it is the power of God unto salvation. We are promised that faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.

Jesus' guys would have "power to heal sickness and to cast out demons." They sure did. We read about it in the Book of Acts.

If this is a tactic, why don't **we** have this power - especially to heal sickness?

Let's ask the apostle Paul. He said,

2Co 12:9 ... [Jesus] said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

2Co 12:10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Paul was used to heal others, but here he explains that the theme of the church age in which we live will be power from weakness. We may think otherwise, but that is God's preferred tactic right now in our struggles.

The choices of men that Jesus made were odd.

Mar 3:16 Simon, to whom He gave the name Peter;

Mar 3:17 James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James, to whom He gave the name Boanerges, that is, "Sons of Thunder";

Mar 3:18 Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Cananite;

Mar 3:19 and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him. And they went into a house.

Simon was given the nickname Peter, meaning rock; but he was anything but stable. We normally point out that after Jesus ascended and sent the Holy Spirit upon these guys, Peter was grounded. That's true, to an extent; but Peter still had problems later on, almost causing a division between Jews and Gentiles by refusing to eat with Gentiles. Paul had to publicly rebuke Peter.

James and John were "Sons of Thunder," meaning they were given to quick over-reactions.

Matthew, the former tax collector, would be despised by the Jews he was sent to reach. He always had an uphill battle.

Simon the Cananite is interesting in that the word translated "cananite" doesn't mean he was from there, but is a word meaning "zealot." The Zealots were members of a first-century political movement among Judean Jews who sought to overthrow the occupying Roman government. Some of them employed violence and were rightfully considered terrorists.

Then there's Judas, the betrayer, one of the weirdest characters in the Bible.

Taken as a group, these guys would not be anyone's first choice.

On top of that, Jesus had just been thronged, almost crushed, by a multitude of needy people. Were twelve guys really going to make that much of a dent in the crowds?

And they weren't going to be sent out at once; they still needed to be with Jesus a while.

The preaching of the Gospel, by disciples, is, itself, a poor tactic, on the surface. Why not use angels to preach to the whole world - like we see in the Book of the Revelation in the future Tribulation?

God's tactic is to use the foolish things to confound the wise. The Gospel has done just that.

[Mar 3:20](#) Then the multitude came together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread.

Jesus and the Twelve returned to Capernaum. Their arrival was noticed and another "multitude came together," seeking help and healing.

There seems to be no concern that Jesus might be crushed. That tells me this multitude was not a satanic tactic to kill Jesus, and therefore the Lord reacted differently.

Though tired from their journey, and hungry, Jesus and the Twelve had no time to rest and eat.

There are going to be times when you must forego your physical needs in order to serve the Lord.

Mar 3:21 But when His own people heard about this, they went out to lay hold of Him, for they said, "He is out of His mind."

In verses thirty-one through thirty-five we're going to see that "His own people" were none other than Jesus' brothers and His mom.

A quick comment regarding Mother Mary. Protestants and Catholics argue over the term "brothers" in this verse.

- **We** say that Mary and Joseph had other children after Jesus was born.
- **They** say Mary was a perpetual virgin, and that the word "brothers" can mean other relatives, e.g., cousins.

But we both miss something even more significant. Mary thought her son was crazy because He was ministering the Gospel while ignoring His own physical needs.

Let me say that again. Mary, venerated by some, accused the Lord, Jesus Christ, of being crazy.

She went with His brothers (whoever you say they were) to "lay hold of Him," to make Jesus *stop* working for God.

It seems as though she was very confused about her son. Far from being the wrongly-named Mother of God, in fact it seems that she was not saved at that point.

How did your family react when you got saved? How does your non-believing family act towards you now?

Many of you faced, or face, hostility. It's a powerful tactic that Satan uses to stop you in your tracks.

Jesus' counter-tactic, seen in verse thirty-five, is to see other believers as your spiritual family, and thereby urge your non-believing relatives to become Christians.

In the ridiculous but still popular musical, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, Judas is more-or-less the hero. At one point he asks,

*Every time I look at you I don't understand  
Why you let the things you did get so out of hand  
You'd have managed better if you'd had it planned  
Why'd you choose such a backward time and such a strange  
land?  
If you'd come today you would have reached a whole nation  
Israel in 4 BC had no mass communication*

While we completely reject the analysis, the songwriter captures what I'm suggesting. God's plan of salvation seems, upon first examination, to be terribly flawed.

For a short time, it seemed that the Gospel would never make it out of the first century. It seemed it would be a Jewish sect.

Why not wait and come when everyone on earth could hear and see Jesus on their smart phone or tablet?

Looking back, we'd have to say it was a brilliant plan. The Gospel has marched through the centuries, all around the world, to the effect of saving multiplied billions of men, women, and children.

It's done so in a weakness that shows it **must** be God doing it.

It's like that paragraph, *One Solitary Life*, showing how Jesus, Who did none of the things normally associated with greatness, nevertheless has had more impact on the world, for good, than all the armies and navies and parliaments and kings.

His impact comes through His followers - it comes through you and I. That, in itself, is scary. It's given rise to the comment, "Christianity is always only one generation from extinction."

Of course, that's not going to happen, because God's providence sees to it that the gates of Hell cannot prevail against the church.

C.S. Lewis captured a sense of the over-all tactic of the Christian life. Here is what he said, and we will close with it:

Now the whole offer which Christianity makes is this: that we can, if we let God have His way, come to share in the life of Christ. If we do, we shall then be sharing a life which was begotten, not made, which always existed and always will exist. Christ is the Son of God. If we share in this kind of life **we also shall be sons of God**. We shall love the Father as He does and the Holy Ghost will arise in us. He came to this world and became a man in order to spread to other men the kind of life He has - by what I call "good infection."

**Every Christian is to become a little Christ.** The whole purpose of becoming a Christian is simply nothing else.