

“When the Pressure Mounts”

Mark 3:7-12

This morning, we will be in Mark chapter 3, and in a moment we will read verses 7-12. During the darkest days of World War II, when bombs were falling on London and much of Europe had already collapsed under the Nazi power, Winston Churchill’s voice became a steady beacon. Through radio, his voice entered homes, bomb shelters, and hospitals, giving hope to citizens living under pressure and uncertainty. Speeches such as, “We Shall Fight on the Beaches,” and “Their Finest Hour,” helped strengthen the resolve of Great Britain during that time. And Churchill himself faced enormous pressure from every direction—military pressure from the war itself, political pressure from members of his own government, emotional pressure from a fearful nation, and personal pressure knowing that every decision made affected millions of lives.

Yet under that pressure, Churchill steadied the nation with resolve. In one of his most famous speeches, he declared that Britain would “Never Surrender.” His leadership during the pressure of crisis became one of the defining moments of modern history.

Now, all of us know what it means to be under pressure. Sometimes, it just seems like life is caving in all around you. Today is Mother’s Day, and no one knows what pressure is like any more than you moms. There’s the constant attention of a little one, or the unending cycle of homework, supper, bath time, bedtime. Next day...repeat!

Anne Morrow Lindbergh — *“The life I have chosen as wife and mother involves a whole caravan of complications. It involves food and shelter; meals, planning, marketing, bills, and making the ends meet in a thousand ways. It involves not*

only the butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker, but countless other experts to keep my modern house with its modern ‘simplifications’ functioning properly (electricity, plumbing, refrigerator, gas-oven, dishwasher, radios, car, and numerous other labor-saving devices). It involves health; doctors, dentists, appointments, medicine, vitamins, trips to the pharmacy. It involves education, spiritual, intellectual, physical; schools, parent/teacher conferences, car pools, extra trips for basketball or band recitals, tutoring, camps, camp equipment, and transportation. It involves clothes, shopping, laundry, cleaning, mending, sewing buttons, or finding someone else to do it. It involves friends, my husband’s, my children’s, my own, and endless arrangements to get together; letters, invitations, telephone calls, and transportation hither and yon.”

I’m exhausted just reading that! It isn’t just true of you moms, but we all feel the pressure of bills that are due, the pressure of aging parents, the pressure of work deadlines. On and on it goes. Life is filled with pressure. And each season of life brings its own unique pressure. Someone has said that life is like peeling an onion—you do so in tears while saying, “This stinks!”

It should be an encouragement to you to know that Jesus understands all of this. We have a Savior who knows what it is to be under pressure. And to see how this is the case, look with me at what Mark says here in our text. (Read)

I want to do my best this morning to help you enter the first century world in your imagination. To take in the sights, the smells, the sounds. As the crowds are pressing all around Jesus, imagine the sounds of babies crying. People asking for a moment of His time. Someone complaining about not being able to find a parking place. If you’re claustrophobic or an introvert, I’m describing a nightmare situation for you. I mean just imagine what it must have been like as crowds of needy people are pressing in on Jesus and His disciples. In fact, that’s the

language that Mark uses to describe what it was like. There's the word 'crush' used in verse 9. Verse 10 says that all who had diseases 'pressed' around Him to touch Him. People in crisis coming from everywhere to find Jesus. And there are so many people with so many needs that Jesus tells the disciples to have a get away boat ready because of the crowd! I'd say that Jesus knows a thing or two about pressure.

Sometimes, I think we miss the fact that Jesus can identify with us in our humanity. He is God in human flesh, without sin, without any imperfection. Yet He is also fully Man. He is able to sympathize with us in our weakness according to what Hebrews 4:15 says. The pressure that was placed on Him in His earthly ministry was immense. In three chapters now, Mark has been showing us how Jesus is the Son of God and the perfect Servant who has come to fulfill the will of the Father.

Kent Hughes — *“Being 100 percent God, the truth is He was also man, and really did feel immense, inescapable stress and strain. For us this means that Jesus was and is the unique man who understands [twenty-first] century mankind. In broadest terms, He understands the harried, frenetic lives of modern men and women...He understands the pressured treadmill upon which most of us race day in and day out.”*

Isn't it wonderful to know that when we are pressured, our Savior understands? Not only does He understand it, but He is your strength and your sufficiency in the midst of it. What are some of the 'pressures' that Jesus faces here? I find three or four categories of pressure that were true in Jesus' life. These same categories can also be expected in our lives as well.

1 – The pressure of facing DIFFICULTIES (3:7a)

“Jesus withdrew with His disciples to the sea...”

Keep in mind that Jesus has been experiencing increased conflict with the religious leaders. Things have reached a fever pitch with the Pharisees so much so that they're now determined to destroy Jesus. And so verse 7 says Jesus withdrew with His disciples to the sea.” Now, He's already had four confrontations with the religious leaders. We've seen this building in chapter 2, so that by verse 6 of the third chapter they are looking for a way to destroy Him. And it isn't something that will go away. It will only get worse throughout the Lord's ministry, eventually leading to His crucifixion.

And so Jesus knows that He needs to get away from the immediate anger. It's not the Father's time yet for Him to be arrested. He doesn't want to expose His disciples to any danger either, so He 'withdrew' to the sea.

“Withdrew” — *compound Greek word (αναχωρέω) which means ‘to go back’ (ana) and ‘to make room for’ (choreo)*

It means to get away from the noise. While certainly not afraid of the confrontation, Jesus saw direct conflict as being counterproductive to His mission at that time. There is a time and place to contend with the enemy, but there is also a time for rest and withdrawal from the heat of battle. Perhaps you've heard the expression, “Pick your battles.” It means you choose not to participate in the minor, petty arguments or confrontations. But you save your resources instead for those that will be of greater importance later. That's what Jesus is doing. He has work to do, and there really is no time to waste on needless arguments with the Pharisees. Sometimes it is better to just save your breath than to use it up arguing with someone for the sake of argument.

Faced with the pressure of conflict, Jesus and His disciples go the sea for some breathing room. That's the idea here. The 'sea' mentioned here of course is the Sea of Galilee. It is one of Jesus' very favorite places. It is mentioned some 41 times in the gospels under a variety of names (the sea of Tiberias, lake of Gennesaret). The Sea of Galilee often became a place of retreat and intimate instruction. Jesus would withdraw from the crowds by boat with His disciples for rest. Even in busy ministry, the sea provided moments of solitude and preparation for what would follow. One commentator says it this way:

Charles Swindoll—*“Jesus withdrew to ‘the sea,’ which is of course the Sea of Galilee. With a lead on the crowds, Jesus and His disciples gained a little solitude there. At this point in Jesus’ ministry, the sound of silence would have been rare to these busy men. I often wonder what they talked about, if they spoke at all. This kind of solitude could only last a few hours at most.”*

I think this brings up an important question: “When the pressure of difficulty seems to be nipping at your heels, how do you respond?” Difficult people, difficult situations, difficult circumstances. If Jesus took time to come apart from it all, don't you think that you should too? Friends, sometimes we just need to take a break. And that's okay. All of that other stuff will be right there waiting for you when you get back. But having had some rest, you will be in a better head space to deal with the stress and the strain of it all. Jesus knew when it was time to 'withdraw' for a season and so should we.

And so there's pressure in facing difficulties. Then notice:

2—The pressure of increasing DEMANDS (3:7b-10)

“Jesus withdrew with His disciples to the sea, and a great crowd followed, from Galilee and Judea 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. And He told His disciples to have a boat ready for Him because of the crowd, lest they crush Him, for He had healed many, so that all who had diseases pressed around Him to touch Him.”

Pressure doesn't just come in the form of conflict. Notice it also comes in the form of demand. As Jesus withdrew with His disciples to the sea, the crowds followed. Verse 7 says a 'great crowd' followed them from Galilee and Judea, and from as far away as Jerusalem, Idumea, and from beyond the Jordan as well as from places like Tyre and Sidon. In other words, countless multitudes of people from miles and miles around were coming to Jesus.

What is interesting is that the regions Mark mentions here comprise all the land that King Solomon had acquired at a time when the nation of Israel had been at its peak. So the idea is that a King much greater than Solomon is now here. Never before had anyone arisen in Israel with the amount of popularity with the crowds that Jesus had. And this wide popularity will bring with it unique pressure.

Why were the crowds coming to Jesus? Look at verse 8:

“When the great crowd heard all that He was doing, they came to Him.”

Keep in mind all that Jesus has been doing thus far in the gospel of Mark. Back in chapter 1, verse 28, we're told that His fame began to spread throughout Galilee after He had commanded an unclean spirit to come out of the man in the synagogue at Capernaum. Then He had gone to the home of Peter and Andrew where He healed Peter's mother-in-law who had been sick with fever. At evening, the whole town showed up at the door, and He healed many who were sick and cast out many demons. Then in 1:40 there was the healing of the leper,

who went out and spread the news of what Jesus had done for him. Then in chapter 2 there was the healing of the paralytic who had been let down through the roof by his four friends. Then there are all the tax collectors and sinners who had gathered in the home of Levi. These are just a few of the reasons why He had such popularity with the crowds. And it was unlike the scribes and Pharisees, whose religious influence seemed to be dwindling while Jesus' popularity is surging. That's one of the reasons the religious leaders hated Him.

Mark 15:10—“For [Pilate] perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered Him up.”

But I do need to point out that verse 8 says the crowd had come to Jesus because they heard of all that He was doing rather than all that Jesus was saying. Remember how He had said that His purpose in coming was to preach, to bear witness to the truth of the gospel, not simply to heal those who were sick or perform miracles. But that is what the crowds were interested in, not so much His message as much as the miracles. And yet despite the fickle, shallow nature of the crowd, Jesus still ministered to them with compassion. He healed many, so that verse 10 says all who had diseases pressed around Him just to touch Him. All who were sick, all who were oppressed, those who were in need of deliverance, they pressed all around Jesus just to reach out and touch Him. And so thick was the crowd that Jesus told the disciples to have a boat ready for Him so He could make a quick escape, lest they 'crush' Him!

Talk about the pressure of being in high demand. Do you ever feel like you're about the cave under the weight of the demands placed on you by other people? We experience pressure because the demand requires some combination of our time, energy, and resources. In Mark 3, the crowds continually pressed upon Jesus because everyone wanted something from Him, whether it was healing, or

some help, or deliverance. In the same way, people today often place expectations on us that can become overwhelming. Family may expect you to provide stability. Employers may expect constant productivity, friends may expect availability, and on it goes. So that over time, the weight of trying to please everyone can lead to emotional exhaustion. I'm not saying that Jesus is trying to please everyone here. As the perfect Son of God, He lived only to please the Father. Yet in His humanity, He is under constant pressure brought about by various demands.

Pressure will increase in your life when the demands are nonstop. It will make you feel pulled in multiple directions at once. It can also become difficult because many people do not recognize our limitations. They see our usefulness more than our humanity. Jesus Himself experienced this kind of pressure when the crowds became so demanding that He and His disciples could not even stop to eat. His example teaches us that while compassion is important, boundaries are essential. No matter how hard you try, you cannot meet every expectation perfectly. It is one thing to serve others faithfully, but it is another thing to allow the demands of other people to replace dependence upon God and destroy your health.

The pressure of facing difficulty, the pressure of increasing demand, and then notice:

3— The pressure of agitating DEMONS (3:11-12)

“And whenever the unclean spirits saw Him, they fell down before Him and cried out, ‘You are the Son of God.’ And He strictly ordered them not to make Him known.”

We have already seen from Mark that Jesus has authority over the spiritual realm. In addition to healing people who were sick, Jesus also delivered those who were oppressed by unclean spirits. But one common thing that we notice is the demons recognize Jesus' identity as the Son of God. It is a thing for which He commands them to silence.

But what I want you to see is that Jesus faces the pressure of constant spiritual interruption and opposition from the demonic realm. The unclean spirits fall before Him and cry out, "You are the Son of God!" At first glance, that sounds like a positive thing, but Jesus sternly commands them not to make Him known. And the reason for it is that He didn't need the publicity of demons! The gospel would spread as it was carried on the lips of those who had been redeemed, men and women who had come to know His grace.

The pressure here is not physical like with the crowds, but it is the pressure of disruptive spiritual interference. So much of the pressure that we face in our lives can often be attributed to spiritual warfare. There is an unseen realm all around us that wants to pressure us in ways that we fail to realize. Paul wanted the Ephesians to recognize this:

Ephesians 6:10-12—“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”

Paul is clear in his words, for he wants us to understand just who exactly our enemy is, and what the nature of the conflict is in which we find ourselves. He

wants us to know that in Christ we have all the resources, all the power we need to live the Christian life. Our salvation is secure due to our vital union with Christ. There's just one more thing we need to know. In spite of all resurrection power that is ours, it will not be easy. Life in a fallen world will involve conflict for the man or woman who is in union with Christ. And this conflict adds to the pressure that we all face.

The Bible says that in the last days, demonic activity will be on the rise. Right now as we speak, it seems like everyone is talking about the 'UAP' report that the government has released. And basically, it shows video footage obtained from military pilots that have recorded strange phenomena that can't really be explained. Don't get caught up in the hype of all that, folks.

1 Timothy 4:1 — “Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful [seducing] spirits and demonic teachings [illusions].”

There is a spiritual battle going on around us, around you and me right now. We have an adversary, and countless demons are working actively for our destruction, as well as the destruction of others. I think about my kids, there are demons who are working for their destruction. Your kids, your friends, your coworkers, your neighbors, members of our church, there are demons working for their destruction. And how do they carry out their work? Through teachings, the Bible says. Not by showing up with red pitchforks and saying, “Here, here's the devil pulling you away from God.” No, deceitful spirits who seem to be speaking that which is good, but it is not. You just think about all the lies the world is promoting all around each of us—our kids, neighbors, coworkers. We're constantly bombarded with this stuff, with the lie which says, “This will satisfy you. This will be good for you. You want this.” It is constantly bombarding and

so we must be on guard. Unidentified flying objects are the least of our concerns. I'm more concerned about the identified threats to soul spelled out in the Bible!

Jesus said of the last days:

Luke 21:11 — “There will be earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven.”

Strange and unexplainable things ought to cause men and women to repent and trust in Christ, and to recognize the fact that they're not in control of their world like they would think. And yet these very same people will believe in life from other planets and UFO's and that kind of thing before they will believe in a loving God who has made them in His image. Unbelief in what is true, belief in what is untrue, this will be widespread before Jesus comes again.

There's the pressure of difficulty, the pressure of demands, the pressure of demons, and then notice one more thing:

4—The pressure of making DECISIONS (3:13-19)

“And He went up on the mountain and called to Him those whom He desired, and they came to Him. And He appointed twelve (whom He also named apostles) so that they might be with Him and He might send them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons. He appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom He gave the name Peter); James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom He gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder); Andrew and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Him.”

I won't say too much about this right now, but Jesus is experiencing pressures associated with opposition to His ministry as well as pressures associated with opportunity for ministry. Here is Mark's list of the Twelve. Don't you find it interesting that in the midst of all this business of ministry, Jesus intentionally calls to Himself these twelve disciples. And He's going to pour Himself into these men before He sends them out with a mission. Now, we'll look at this next time, but before He officially appoints these twelve, Luke's account says Jesus spent all night in prayer before the Father. Think about it. When faced with the pressure of these growing difficulties, increasing demands, agitating demons, and making decisions—Jesus prays!

Mark gives us a helpful picture of how Jesus handled the mounting pressure—crowds, opposition, expectations, and constant demands. Rather than reacting impulsively, He responds with intentional action and complete dependence upon the Father. And He doesn't buckle under the weight of it all, but is revealed to be our faithful High Priest.

Here are some principles as we close:

- **Strategically 'withdraw' when you find yourself needing to catch your breath**

Jesus 'withdrew' to the sea, not because He was defeated or overwhelmed, but to manage the situation wisely. The Pharisees were looking to destroy Him, but His time had not yet come. The crowds were pressing in so intensely that people were being crushed just to touch Him. When pressure mounts, stepping back is not weakness. Rather, it's a good way to regain your perspective and maintain effectiveness. If Jesus took the time to 'withdraw' and He is the perfect Son of God, I think there's an important lesson here for us as well.

- **Don't let yourself always be controlled by the demands of other people**

Jesus takes some practical steps—having a boat ready—to prevent being overwhelmed. He silences the demons who were proclaiming His identity. And even though they spoke the truth, He didn't need their publicity. Pressure comes with competing expectations that are often put on our plate. Not every voice in your life deserves influence. Responding to this means setting boundaries and refusing to be tyrannized by the urgent.

- **Prioritize spiritual growth over frenzied activity**

Before any further ministry, Jesus goes up on the mountain and calls those He desires. The emphasis is not first on what they will do, but that they might 'be with Him.' And only then are they sent out to preach and exercise authority. I think sometimes we're under pressure to do more. But Jesus shows that the deeper need is to be grounded in relationship with God. Effectiveness in our lives flows from fellowship with Jesus, not mere activity.

- **Do what you can to surround yourself with other people**

Jesus appoints the twelve apostles, giving them shared responsibility in the mission. Jesus could have chosen to have angels announce the spread of the gospel, but He chooses to use ordinary men. He will pour Himself into these men and send them out as His witnesses. So that even the Son of God in His earthly ministry didn't operate as a lone individual. I've learned the hard way in my life that pressure only intensifies when I try to carry everything all by myself. We need delegation and companionship from trusted friends.

Are you under pressure? Maybe experiencing the strain of life one way or another? Maybe like me, you can identify with Annie Johnson Flint's poem called 'Pressed.' Listen to these lines:

*Pressed out of measure and pressed to all length;
Pressed so intensely it seems, beyond strength!
Pressed in the body and pressed in the soul;
Pressed in the mind till the dark surges roll.
Pressure by foes, and pressure by friends;
Pressure on pressure, till life nearly ends!*

Isaiah 53:4-6—“Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was pierced for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”

In Mark 3, the crowds were ‘pressing’ in on Jesus because He had what they needed. The sick came because He is their healing. The demon-oppressed came because He is their deliverance. And the truth is that people are pressing still today, weighed down by sin, guilt, hopelessness, and anxiety. Friend, the good news of the gospel is that the same Jesus who stood by the Sea of Galilee still has the authority to save, heal, forgive, and transform lives today! You do not have to carry the weight of your sin, or be needlessly weighed down by all the pressures of life. Bring it all to Him! Jesus Christ came, died on the cross for sinners, and rose again so that anyone who trusts in Him will be forgiven and made new. And so instead of running from Him under pressure, run to the Savior who is still able to save and sustain all who trust in Him.