

Twelve Shepherds to Assist Jesus in His Gracious Work

Mark 3:13-19

Halifax: 3 March 2019, 10:30 AM

Introduction

Currently in our sermon series in Mark's gospel, we are in chapter 3 where we see the responses of various groups of people to Jesus and how Jesus responds to them.

- So far, we have had two sermons on this:
 - Two weeks ago, we saw the Pharisees who opposed Jesus for healing a man, calling it a violation of the Sabbath, when in fact it was only a violation of their tradition (if even that—Jesus did not even touch the man to heal him).
 - He put them to shame before all.
 - Last week, we saw how Jesus withdrew from the synagogue after this and began to preach by the Sea of Galilee—and we saw the responses of disciples who continued with their master, of the multitudes who followed Him there but did not become true followers, and of the demons who continued to react to Him.
 - This week we are going to see Jesus choosing twelve men from among His disciples to be His closest disciples and official apostles.

We will see how this was a gracious act of our Lord for the whole world, we will see what sort of men He choose, and we will see how we ought to respond to all of this.

- Please give careful attention as I read this account to you from God's Word.
- I will be reading from Mark 3:13-19.
- Remember that this is the holy Word of God, given to us by our gracious Lord.

Mark 3:13-29: And He went up on the mountain and called to *Him* those He Himself wanted. And they came to Him. ¹⁴ Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach, ¹⁵ and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons: ¹⁶ Simon, to whom He gave the name Peter; ¹⁷ James the *son* of Zebedee and John the brother of James, to whom He gave the name Boanerges, that is, "Sons of Thunder"; ¹⁸ Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the *son* of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Cananite; ¹⁹ and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him. And they went into a house.

May the Lord help us to receive His holy word to apply it to our hearts and souls.

Just what is our gracious Lord up to here in this text?

I. He is summoning twelve men to assist Him in spreading the gospel in the world—a gracious act for the whole world.

A. We have seen all along that Jesus' great desire was to spread the gospel.

- He said, "For this purpose I have come forth."
- 1. Gospel, you will recall, means "good news." Jesus Himself is the good news.
 - He was the Son of God who had come into the world to save sinners not only in Israel, but in all the nations.

- He had come to fulfill all righteousness so that sinners could, through faith in Him, be justified—made righteous by His merit.
 - He came as a priest to offer the only sacrifice that could atone for sin, and that sacrifice was the sacrifice of Himself—He Himself would suffer the pains of hell.
 - And He came as the righteous King of a kingdom that serves God, and by His representation as our head, the kingdom is righteous.
 - In Jesus, we have full reconciliation to God through faith in Him.
2. Jesus, as the one who came in His gracious love, to do this saving work, is zealous to ensure that He is proclaimed to Israel and to all the nations that they might believe.
- And so it was, that in His gracious love, He called twelve men to help Him to proclaim this message—to overtake sinners by relentless grace.
 - As His chosen representatives, they are the link between us and Jesus by which we learn of Him and of His saving work.
 - They are foundational to the dissemination of the gospel.
 - Without them, we would not have an official record of Christ and His saving work.
 - It is by believing the gospel that they have given us in scripture, either by their own writing or by the writing of official prophets who heard them.
 - How our Lord loves us! That is why He gave these men to us.
 - He wants the world to hear the gospel and that is the reason He made these arrangements for it to be preached by them, and then by others after them.

B. He appointed the twelve to be *with Him* to enable them to their work.

1. In the immediate situation, they were *with Him* as His assistants.
 - They went around with Him and served Him as such.
 - They often made arrangements or ran errands for Him.
 - They assisted Him in preaching and in healing (more about that in a moment).
2. As those who were *with Him*, they also received training for their future work.
 - They heard Him teach publicly, and they were with Him when He ministered to individuals.
 - They saw how He lived His life: His patience, His wisdom, His prayer life, His holiness, His purity, His calmness in the face of danger, His firmness, His obedience to the Father... so many things... all before their eyes.
 - They also received personal instruction from Him—often in the form of correction.
 - They heard His promises, they heard of His purpose to go and die on the cross, they were taught the way of love and obedience and sacrifice.
3. But perhaps most of all, they were *with Him* that they might testify of Him after He was gone.
 - They were appointed to be His witnesses... those who testified of Him to all the world of what they had seen and heard.

- As John says in 1 John 1:1-4: **That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—² the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—³ that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. ⁴ And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.**
 - John realises what a marvellous thing it was that they saw Him and that His function with the other of the twelve was to testify of Him to the world that the world might be saved.
 - There were twelve of them to show that here was the One who was promised to restore Israel with their twelve tribes.
 - And for the Gentiles, this was a reminder that “salvation is of the Jews,” that the only Saviour of the world is the Son of David the Son of Abraham.
 - It was only by being with Him that they could give such a testimony.
- C. You see in our text that Jesus gave them authority to be those who preached the gospel.
- Verses 14-15 say: **Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach, ¹⁵ and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons...**
 - 1. As His official witnesses who would proclaim Him after He was gone, they were given the ability to perform miracles like He did.
 - Their preaching, like His, was accompanied by signs and miracles.
 - Healing sickness to show His authority over the curse...
 - And casting out demons to show His authority over Satan and his emissaries.
 - 2. It was by such signs and wonders that Jesus showed that He had been sent by the Father and that He Himself was the Son of God,
 - because He performed this miracles in His own name and by His own direct authority, showing everyone that He Himself was from heaven.
 - In this way, He showed that both He and His doctrine were from heaven.
 - 3. And it was by the same signs and wonders that the twelve showed that they were the true witnesses of Jesus.
 - They did not perform these signs and wonders in their own name, but only did them in the name of Jesus, showing that their authority was from Him so that all might believe their testimony concerning Him.
 - Hebrews 2:3-4 says: **How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard *Him*, ⁴ God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?”**

TRANS> How kind our Lord was to provide these men to officially testify to us of Him, that we might know Him and believe in Him for salvation.

II. But what sort of men did our Lord choose?

A. We are told in verse 13 that **He called to Him those He Himself wanted**, or more literally, He summoned whom He willed.

1. You see from this that it was purely *His* choice, not theirs.
 - As He later said to them, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you” (John 15:16).
2. So there was a deliberateness about the ones that He chose.
 - They were the ones that best suited His purposes.
 - There is something for us to learn by looking at what they were like.
3. We are given a list of their names.
 - We hear much more about Peter, James, and John,
 - a limited amount more about Andrew, Philip, Matthew (who is Levi the tax collector that we already met) and Thomas...
 - And nothing more at all about the rest of them except Judas of whom we here of his betrayal of our Lord which is mentioned here by Mark in introducing him to us.
 - I might mention here that Judas we latter replaced by Matthias who was also with Jesus throughout His ministry.
 - Judas was chosen deliberately to teach us that the ministry will never be without hypocrites, but even more that he might betray the Lord Jesus to fulfill God’s purposes already revealed in scripture.

TRANS> But again, I have no intention of attempting to do character sketches of each of these men today... it is impossible with those for whom we have only their names...

- and it belongs to another time and place to speak of the ones we do know about as individuals.
- But today, I want to look more in general way at the men that Jesus chose.
 - What was true about them as a group?
 - There is one thing that especially stands about them...

B. They are quite ordinary men.

1. They are not rich men, but neither are they particularly poor.
 - Matthew was a tax collector, so may have had some means, and the ones who were fishermen had a fishing business and provided well for themselves as seen by owning boats, but they were not rich men either.
 - If any of the others were particularly so, we have no record of it.
2. And of those we know, they were not educated men, but they were literate and knew how to read and write.
3. They were not particularly refined in their manners, but neither were they particularly rude.
4. They were not brilliant men, but neither were they particularly simple minded.
5. They do not appear to be especially shrewd, but neither are they gullible.
6. They are neither high achievers, nor dropouts, who were idle—I have already spoken of the example of the fishermen.

7. They do not appear to be super religious, but neither do they seem to be impious or ungodly—
 - Of course that must be taken in context—
 - Relative to our own society the Jewish people at this time were quite religious—but among their own people they were rather ordinary.
8. We find them not particularly bold, but neither are they cowards—
 - we see them responding in fear when most people would (when there is a storm at sea or when Jesus is threatened and arrested and crucified).

TRANS> There is really nothing that stands out about any of them that we are told about.

- They are ordinary men with ordinary jobs that received a very extraordinary call from Jesus to be His disciples and apostles.

C. Why did Jesus choose such ordinary fellows to be His witnesses?

1. He chose ordinary men because they were best suited to the task to which He called them.
 - He did not call them to help Him figure things.
 - They were not called to be great theologians who found ways to systematise and explain the doctrines of our faith.
 - They were not called to come up with new ways of organising the church or new codes of ethics and methodologies.
 - They were not called to be either innovators or creators of new things.
 - He called them to follow Him that they might be His faithful witnesses.
 - They were to be *reliable* rather than innovative.
 - They were dealing with the revealing of the Son of God and we did not need to know their reflections about Him or their interpretations of how things ought to be done...
 - We needed a reliable testimony of all that He said and all that He did because it is Him, not His disciples and their ideas, that we must know and believe if we are to have eternal life.
2. Related to this, Jesus chose ordinary men that it might be clear that their doctrine was not their own.
 - Peter says it very well in 2 Peter 2:16 when he reflects on their apostolic ministry: **For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty.**
 - They were not the kind of men who were capable of coming up with clever stories—and everyone could see that about them...
 - But they were men who were quite capable of telling what they saw... that they saw Him who was crucified raised again, and that they saw Him perform miracles and that they heard Him say the things that they told us that He said... that He was the Son of God and that through faith in Him, we may have eternal life.
 - They even testified that their ability to recall what Jesus had said and did so well was only because of the Holy Spirit who had been given to them and by whom they preached and did signs and wonders.

3. Jesus also chose ordinary men to make it clear that they were empowered by His Spirit.
 - They did not have their authority from their own personal achievements, but from Him.
 - As I mentioned before, when they taught, they also did healings and exorcisms, but always in His name to show that their power and authority was from Him.
 - They were just ordinary men, yet their words came with great authority.
 - When they chief priests and scribes heard them, they recognised where their power came from as Acts 4:13 testifies: **Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus.**
 - The Apostle Paul who *was* a very educated and brilliant man made the observation in 1 Corinthians 1:26-29 that: **For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. ²⁷ But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; ²⁸ and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, ²⁹ that no flesh should glory in His presence.**
 - As he said in 2 Cor 4:7, **that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.**

TRANS> So we may sum up by saying that Jesus chose ordinary men to an extraordinary work so that all the glory would go to Him as our Saviour, the Son of God, the sole object of our faith!

III. So how should you respond to all of this?

A. First of all, you should hear these men!

1. As I mentioned before, they are our link to Jesus Christ and our knowledge of Him and His saving work for us.
 - Receive their testimony as it is given to us in the gospel.
 - Don't let anybody corrupt the plain testimony with their own clever ideas (as has been done again again) that will be seen as foolish by the next generation.
 - Jesus appointed them to be His witnesses to us and we need to receive their words as sure and certain—brought by the Spirit of God.
 - This is how we know Him.
2. Some people are too proud to receive doctrine from fishermen written in an ancient book.
 - They want to have God speak directly to them, or they will not hear.
 - That is very foolish.
 - If God has chosen to reveal Himself to us through prophets and apostles that He has appointed—and yes, through His Son—but His Son who is testified to us by apostles... should we object and refuse His gracious revelation?

- Those who reject the scriptures as their only rule of faith and practice always go astray much more than they think they will.
 - They are those we saw last week spoken of in Romans who do not like to retain the truth of God in their minds and so are turned over to ridiculous ideas about God (idols) and vile conduct.
 - At first, they reject a couple of details, but if they don't repent, soon they will reject the very gospel itself. Nobody sets out to do that, but that is where they all end up.
3. Remember that it was Jesus Himself who said to His apostles:
- Luke 10:16: **“He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me.”**
 - That is as true today as it ever was.
 - The scriptures are able to make you wise for salvation.
 - Treat them as the word of God, for that is what they are.
 - That means that you will not neglect them, but you will read them with hunger and desire to know Christ through them.
 - It means that you will read them and hear them preached with diligence and with prayer and with faithfulness.
 - And it means that you will receive them with love and with reverence and delight and believe them and obey them.

TRANS> That is the first way you should respond—hear these men.

B. Second, you should give thanks to Jesus for appointing these men.

1. What a gracious thing it is.
 - When He appointed these men, He was thinking of the church that He loves and that He gave Himself for.
 - He was thinking of all of us who would believe.
 - He did it for us that we might hear and believe their testimony.... that we might have eternal life and live with Jesus forever as His redeemed people with our children.
2. Thank the Lord for giving us the Holy Scriptures.
 - Remember Psalm 119:161-168 which we had as our Psalm of Focus?
 - It begins with these lines: ¹⁶¹ **Princes persecute me without a cause, but my heart stands in awe of Your word.** ¹⁶² **I rejoice at Your word as one who finds great treasure.** ¹⁶³ **I hate and abhor lying, but I love Your law.** ¹⁶⁴ **Seven times a day I praise You, because of Your righteous judgments.**

C. Third, you should pray for the ongoing influence of these men in the world.

1. Not as those who are active in our midst now, but as those who left us the words they spoke, the gospel of Jesus. Pray that the word would increase and spread into all the world.
 - That those in darkness would hear and come to the light.
 - That Jesus would be known as He is revealed.
 - That our children would receive the word and continue in it.
 - That the church would continue steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine.

2. It is remarkable how often Paul speaks of prayer for the word.
 - Remember, for example, 2 Thess 3:1?
 - He says: **Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, just as it is with you...**

D. And finally, you should imitate the apostles.

1. Imitate them by not rating the value of your own insights, experience, ideas, creations, deductions, and so on above the gospel.
 - There is nothing wrong with telling of your own conversion or of encouragement that you have from God's word.
 - It is good to do this and it is good to do systematic theology—but never at the expense of the testimony of scripture—always in subjection to it.
 - And always remember that what people you speak to need most is the plain truth about Jesus Christ... not your ideas about the truth—but the truth itself.
 - That is one of the reasons God has appointed the preaching of the word to continue to this day by those who have been set apart to preach the gospel.
 - And that preaching is to be tested by its fidelity to God's word, not by how clever it seems in our age.
 - We do not preach ourselves or our ideas, but Christ Jesus the Lord.
2. A second way you should be like the apostles is to rely on Jesus to do the work by His power and His Spirit.
 - They knew that the authority they had to preach and to testify and to heal and cast out demons was not of themselves, but from God.
 - We need to pray that God would help us to be His witnesses like they were, each according to our calling... our strength is only from Him.
3. And finally, imitate the apostles in ways that are appropriate to YOUR calling and place.
 - a. The office of apostle has no successor...
 - They were those who were appointed to be with Jesus that they might provide testimony to the whole world of Him—of what they saw and heard of Him when He carried out His ministry in this world.
 - Nobody alive today can be an apostle because we were not there.
 - That is the reason that our imitation of them is to be in accordance with our calling and place.
 - b. What does that mean?
 - 1) There are some who are called to be preachers—
 - but their preaching must be based not upon their own testimony, but that of the apostles found in scripture.
 - For them, preaching the word is preaching the scriptures.
 - 2) And the signs and wonders that God gave them.
 - We can pray for God to heal people, but we look silly and bring reproach on Christ when we try to imitate the unique miracle-working ministry of the apostles.

- God is not confirming you in that way—He confirmed His word in that way when it was given.
 - Now He may answer our prayers, but we do not do healings the way the apostles did.
- 3) And the same with exorcisms...
 - Yes, we oppose the devil always, but ours is not a day when God is especially displaying that His kingdom has come by exorcisms.
 - We have other ways of opposing the devil.
- 4) But perhaps most of all, imitate these men by keeping up communion with Jesus.
 - They went everywhere with Him on the earth—you cannot do that the way they did when He was here...
 - But they kept up communion by faith through the Holy Spirit after He was gone—by prayer and by the word...
 - And you can imitate that.
 - We have this word of the apostles so that we can abide in Christ by abiding in His word.
 - Do that, and you will do well.