

Jesus Calls the Twelve Apostles
Mark 3:13-35
Key Verse: 3:13,14a

“Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve—designating them apostles—that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach....”

Today’s passage is indeed significant in Mark’s gospel: the calling of the twelve apostles. As we have seen thus far, Jesus’ ministry to the crowds had broad appeal. People from all over Israel experienced the kingdom of God through Jesus. However, Jesus was not satisfied with this. In calling the twelve, Jesus begins to lay a foundation for ministry that will reach the whole world, and future generations. It is important for us to study this passage prayerfully and thoughtfully. We can learn the mind and heart of Jesus, and the nature of disciple raising. Then we can be good disciples of Jesus and disciple-makers as well.

First, Jesus called to him those he wanted (13).

Jesus worked hard every day to serve needy people. Yet this time Jesus stepped away from the crowd. Look at verse 13. “Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him.” Luke 6:12 says, “Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God.” Through prayer, Jesus asked God’s wisdom to choose the twelve. Thus, their calling originated in God, not in themselves. Jesus told them in John 15:16a, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last.” Jesus chose the twelve according to God’s purpose to bear spiritual fruit for his glory. Jesus’ calling was not earned or deserved, but was given by God’s grace. So the disciples should be thankful always. Moreover, they cannot cancel their calling. Sometimes they may feel unworthy due to their failures and repeated sins. They may think, “If I were God, I would dismiss me and find a better disciple.” But they have no right to terminate their calling. God calls them by his sovereign choice, and God does not revoke his calling. Romans 11:29 says, “...for God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable.”

Whom did Jesus call? “...those he wanted....” In Greek the word “wanted” is “*thelo*.” It carries the idea “to be resolved or determined, to purpose.” Jesus had his own absolute purpose in mind when he chose the twelve. Jesus chose the best men to fit his purpose. To human eyes, they may seem unqualified. But to Jesus, they were the best men. There is a divine mystery in Jesus’ calling. We cannot discover it through self-evaluation. We can discover it in Jesus.

Amy Carmichael was born in 1867 in Ireland with brown eyes. But blue was her favorite color. As a girl, she prayed one night, “God make my eyes blue.” The next morning, she ran to the mirror expecting to see blue; but they were still brown. Later, she went to India as a missionary. Sometimes she disguised herself as an Indian woman to learn the real life of Indian people. She died her skin dark brown and wore traditional clothes. One day she realized that blue eyes would ruin her disguise. In God’s purpose, brown eyes were just right for her mission. Romans 8:28 says, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” We may not understand everything at the time of calling. But those who obey Jesus’ calling can be sure of God’s love, God’s goodness to them, and of final victory, no matter what the present situation.

To participate in Jesus’ ministry as disciple makers, we must recognize Jesus’ sovereignty. Jesus chooses whom he wants. The people Jesus chooses may not be the ones we want. But if Jesus has chosen them, we must learn to accept them. This is the first step in being a fruitful disciple maker.

Verse 13 ends, “...and they came to him.” Those whom Jesus called came willingly. There was irresistible grace in Jesus’ call. There was divine authority in Jesus’ call. Jesus’ disciple raising ministry was deeply rooted in the sovereignty of God.

Second, “that they might be with him” (14).

Look at verse 14. “He appointed twelve—designating them apostles—that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach....” From the beginning, Jesus designated them apostles. An apostle is one who is sent as a messenger of the gospel. These men would be ambassadors of Jesus’ kingdom. Their spiritual influence would

change the world and future generations. Of course, Jesus knew that there were some nasty elements in them that needed changing. However, Jesus was sure that they would grow to be great apostles.

Jesus prepared them by letting them “be with him.” This was the greatest privilege. Jesus is God. Jesus’ one touch could heal any kind of disease. Jesus’ one word could drive out demons and bring new life to the soul. Everyone wanted to be with Jesus. But Jesus gave a special privilege of being with him to the twelve appointed men.

What does it mean to “be with him”? To begin with, they followed Jesus everywhere. They were with Jesus at the house, in the fields, by the seashore, on the mountain, in the boat, on the road, in the synagogue, at the temple, and in the upper room. They were with Jesus in Nazareth, Capernaum, the Gerasenes, Caesarea Philippi, Jerusalem, Dalmanutha, and Gethsemane. They were with Jesus when he was traveling, preaching, teaching, driving out demons, healing the sick, calming storms, feeding crowds, eating and sleeping. The only times they were not with Jesus were when he was praying in private, and at the cross. Jesus taught them the word of God. Jesus taught them his mind and heart. Jesus engaged them in his ministry in various ways. They learned Jesus’ person and character, including his spiritual, ethical and moral life. Being with Jesus sanctified their inner beings (Jn 15:3). For example, Matthew, a former tax collector, wrote the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus formed godly character in them to be his ambassadors on earth.

The late Bible expositor, G. Campbell Morgan, was moved by the word “with” in verse 13, and wrote in his book, *The Gospel According to Mark*: “The preposition ‘with’ indicates the very closest association, an association which inevitably and invariably issues in resemblance, and consequently in true instrumentality. They became men through whom He [Jesus] could act unhindered. In the mystic mystery of Pentecost they became actual members of His body, mastered by His intelligence, driven by His emotions, governed by His volitions.” (pg 69)

Can we be with Jesus today? Yes! Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus dwells in those who obey his words (Jn 14:23). Jesus remains in those who remain in his words (Jn 15:4). Jesus promises that where two or three gather in his name, Jesus is there with them (Mt 18:20). It is most important for Jesus’ disciples to be with Jesus. We can be with Jesus through Bible study, Christian fellowship, and prayer. One young woman felt called to be Jesus’ disciple. Yet her heart was full of worldly desires, especially for shopping. During the last two years, she has faithfully written Bible testimonies and shared them with tears in a Christian fellowship. Her inner person has changed. She loves Jesus. She cares sincerely about her God-given Bible students. She will be one of the main speakers at her Easter Bible Conference. Shepherd Joseph Hester was once fearful and unbelieving. Pastor Abraham and Dr. Liz Lincoln studied the Bible with him faithfully for several years and helped him write and share Bible testimonies in his fellowship. Gradually, the word of God and love of God changed him. He grew in genuine faith and the compassion of Jesus. He married a beautiful woman of God, Stacy, and cares for her and Anna with the love of God. He served a homeless man, Bob, as his own dear uncle. Now he prays to teach the Bible to students.

When Jesus called the twelve, he called them as a group, “...that they might be with him.” In America we have a strong idea about individualism and privacy. Many try to follow Jesus by themselves, without anyone’s help. Many feel free to break their relationship with a Christian community in an instant, if they are challenged. However, in many cases, when they leave church, they leave Jesus. Then, as they listen to seductive music, use Facebook, or look at graphic images, they think they are alone and free. Yet, they are not alone. When they are not with Jesus, they are with Satan. So they never grow spiritually and remain like patients on life support, surviving by the unsolicited prayers of others.

How can we become apostles of Jesus? We must be with Jesus and with Jesus’ people all the time. We must be with Jesus and Jesus’ people even when we don’t feel like it—especially when we don’t feel like it. We should invite Jesus into all of our relationships. We must be with Jesus in our homes and in our apartments. In those settings, we reveal our sins and see others’ sins. We must learn to repent daily. We must learn to bear with others, forgive others, and pray for others. Gradually we will be sanctified (1 Jn 1:7). Let’s remember that the secret to growing as apostles is to be with Jesus and his people all the time.

Third, “send them out to preach” (14-15).

Jesus did not intend for his apostles to form a separated community on earth, or to become a spiritual honor society. Jesus wanted to send them out to preach the gospel to the ends of the earth. The word preach, “k?russ?” in Greek,

means “to be a herald; with a suggestion of formality, gravity, and authority which must be listened to and obeyed.” Preaching is declaring Jesus’ message with his authority, evoking a response. To bear this kind of authority and responsibility, the disciples needed to learn and grow constantly. Especially, they needed to learn the humility of Jesus and the servant attitude of Jesus and the compassionate father’s heart of Jesus. They also needed to know the Scriptures, and the meaning of Jesus’ suffering, death and resurrection, and how to communicate with love and power. They needed to be courageous and bold. Each one was different, and each had his own gift from God. Yet they all participated in the preaching ministry. Peter’s spoken sermons are legendary. Matthew’s written gospel is legendary.

UBF lay shepherds are self-supporting gospel preachers. We must be excellent in our professions and excellent Bible teachers. We must always be ready to preach the word of God. St. Paul said to Timothy, “In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction.” (2 Ti 4:1-2). We must preach the word as of first importance.

Look at verse 15. “...and to have authority to drive out demons.” Gospel work is primarily a struggle against the power of Satan and his agents. When Jesus’ message is preached in the authority that Jesus gives, demons tremble and flee, and people are set free.

Fourth, these are the twelve (16-19).

Mark introduces the apostles. Let’s read verses 16-19. “These are the twelve he appointed: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means Sons of Thunder); Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.” The chosen apostles were all men, and they were hard workers. They had learning minds and were flexible like new wineskins. They were faithful and courageous in putting Jesus first. Jesus took these men and changed them, by being with them, into men of God who shook the world with the gospel.

Let’s consider Simon briefly. Jesus gave him the name “Peter” which means “rock.” Jesus believed he would be a true spiritual leader and the foundation of his church. Peter was a hardworking man with a learning attitude toward Jesus (Lk 5:5). But he had a big problem in his inner man: fear. Though he had a strong speaking voice, from time to time he would become unstable and make a big mistake. On the night Jesus was arrested, Peter denied knowing Jesus three times. It was a complete failure as Jesus’ disciple. Peter wept bitterly. But he also remembered Jesus’ words to him. Jesus had foretold that this would happen. Jesus had promised to meet him again in Galilee after his resurrection. So Peter went there and met Jesus. Jesus cooked a delicious breakfast for him and said to him three times, “Do you love me?” “Feed my sheep.” The Risen Christ restored Peter, healing his fear with the love of God. After that Peter was changed. He became a courageous preacher of the gospel, even to the Jewish religious leaders. He became a sacrificial shepherd who gave his life for the flock of God. He became a source of great spiritual encouragement to the early church in the time of fierce persecution. In the end, Jesus made Peter the rock and used him greatly for his world salvation purpose. Each disciple has his own story. But the essential truth for each is that Jesus changed him into a powerful gospel preacher for his purpose. Jesus still calls and uses a handful of ordinary men to change the world with the gospel.

Fifth, Jesus deals with rising opposition (20-35).

Look at verse 20. “Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat.” Jesus served the needy with all his heart. The disciples were fully engaged in watching and assisting. They must have felt like somebodies, though they were still short on labor power and spiritual understanding. Anyway, they suffered with Jesus, having no time to eat. Jesus’ family members thought he was out of his mind. They went to take charge of him.

Look at verse 22. “And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, ‘He is possessed by Beelzebub! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons.’” These men were accredited teachers of the law from the best university in Israel. They carried the official decision of the “Jewish Religious Leaders’ Association.” But in truth they were jealous of Jesus. So they called Jesus demon possessed. It was a diabolical effort to destroy Jesus and his ministry.

Let's read verses 23-27. "So Jesus called them and spoke to them in parables: 'How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come. In fact, no one can enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he can rob his house.'" Jesus pointed out that it would be completely illogical and irrational for Satan to oppose himself. Only a stronger power could subdue him. Jesus was the stronger man.

Look at verses 28-30. "I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin." He said this because they were saying, 'He has an evil spirit.'" When people say the Holy Spirit is a demon, they completely lose discernment between good and evil. They become too hardhearted to repent. They are destined to go to hell with the evil spirits forever.

While Jesus was teaching the people around him, his mother and brothers arrived and stood outside the door. They did not go in, but sent someone in to call Jesus. Perhaps they wanted to take Jesus on an extended vacation. But Jesus did not move. Jesus said, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" Then, looking at those seated around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother." Jesus had lived for 30 years as a good son and a good brother. But when his messianic ministry began, he put his mission first, before family fellowship. Jesus was not anti-family, or hostile to his family members. But Jesus set a clear priority to carry out his mission first.

Jesus loved his disciples as spiritual family members. They put God first in their lives. They left everything behind to follow Jesus. Jesus honored their decisions and loved them dearly. Those who obey God's will are all spiritual family members regardless of any human differences. We love and honor those who obey God's will. Recently, Missionary John Lee in Paraguay was shot by a robber. Many people of God around the world began to pray for him and send needed material support. God heard our prayers and began to heal him remarkably. Now he is recovering well in body, drawing closer to the Lord in spirit and well supplied materially. Sometimes those who leave everything to follow Jesus feel lonely, missing their natural family members. However, we enter into a new family in Christ, a family of everlasting love that spans the globe and reaches down through the ages.

Today we mainly thought about Jesus' calling the twelve. Jesus' calling is his grace given to ordinary people for God's purpose. Jesus calls us to "be with him." Jesus changes us into holy children of God and powerful gospel workers. Jesus can use a handful of ordinary men to revive the spiritual life in our nation once again.