

JESUS CALLS THE TWELVE APOSTLES

Mark 2:23-3:30

Key Verses: 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...."

Today's passage includes three events: First, Jesus defends his [disciples](#)' cause against the Pharisees' accusation (2:23-28), second, Jesus heals a man with a shriveled hand (3:1-12), third, Jesus calls the twelve apostles (3:13-30). The Pharisees were supposed to be spiritual leaders, but they were useless to God because they were selfish and self-righteous. They were indifferent to their suffering people. The world was so dark that many people were becoming mental patients. But Jesus was not discouraged. He called the Twelve to train them as his disciples for the future work of salvation.

I. Jesus defends his disciples' cause (2:23-28)

Obviously, the disciples were young and hungry all the time. While they were walking along through the grainfields on a Sabbath day, unintentionally, the disciples picked some heads of grain, rubbed them in their hands, and put them in their mouths to satisfy their always-hungry stomachs. The Pharisees saw them and said to Jesus, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?" (24) The Pharisees harangued on the Sabbath law so as to press a charge against Jesus and his disciples with the Sabbath law. In [the Jewish](#) law, work on the Sabbath was forbidden (Ex 20:10). To the Pharisees' eyes, the disciples were doing what was illegal because they worked on the Sabbath. By picking heads of grain, they reaped; by rubbing the grain, they threshed; by flinging away the husks, they winnowed. The Pharisees' way of interpreting the Sabbath law was too doggedly legalistic; they were always carping. The Sabbath law, which is the fourth commandment (Ex 20:8-11), is very simple. It is to worship God and to serve one's neighbor in God. But the Pharisees hedged the Sabbath law with so many petty rules that its primary purpose was lost.

Jesus knew that the Pharisees were condemning his disciples in their hearts. Jesus immediately cited David's story (1Sa 21:1-6), so as to defend his disciples' cause. David was fleeing for his life; he went to the tabernacle in Nob, to Ahimelech the priest, and demanded food. But Ahimelech had no bread except the consecrated bread, which was lawful only for priests to eat (26). In a time of need, David took and ate that consecrated bread, even though it was unlawful. By telling this illustration, Jesus defended his disciples' cause: They were not unlawful; they were only hungry. The law of God cannot be a collection of rules and regulations only to oppress people. Essentially, it should be the guidebook through which one can come to know God and his wonderful [love](#) for humankind. Therefore, if we observe God's law ignoring the spirit of the law, the law of God is in a decline. The Pharisees had no spirit of the law. They were dead spiritually.

Jesus kept on saying in verses 27,28, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath." What then is the meaning of the Sabbath? "Sabbath" means

rest. It is the day of rest in God after working hard for six days. It is spiritual rest. Spiritual rest comes when we worship God by listening to God's words and when we serve others, even with a cup of water in the name of Jesus. This is the reason we say "worship service" instead of saying "worship meeting." Jesus is the center of the Sabbath day. In this way, Jesus defended his unruly disciples. When we are supposed to raise Jesus' disciples, we must learn how to defend or embrace our sheep. We also must protect our sheep from legalistic old Christians. Sometimes we become legalistic when our sheep never change. We must repent and follow Jesus' principle.

II. Jesus heals a man with a shriveled hand (3:1-12)

After this, Jesus went into the synagogue. A man with a shriveled hand was there (1). He had a serious life problem because his one hand was shriveled. A man's hands symbolize hardworking spirit and creativeness. Do you know why God gave two hands to man? Because effective work requires cooperation. But this man could use only one hand. So he was always a loser. When someone punched him twice, left and right, he could only punch back once. Thus he was a loser all the time. He could not play the piano. He was probably not born with a shriveled hand. Something terrible must have happened to his hand. So he couldn't work well. Nevertheless, he had to make a living. But each time he applied for a job, he was turned down. Because of his one shriveled hand, his whole outlook on life must have been crippled. To this man, a day of salvation came. As soon as Jesus saw him, Jesus' heart went out to him. Jesus said to himself, "Oh, my son's one hand is shriveled." Jesus was ready to make him whole. But it was a Sabbath day and the Pharisees watched Jesus closely to see if he would dare to heal him on the Sabbath, ignoring their political authority (2). In this case, Jesus could have postponed the man's case until an opportune time came, for he was not an emergency case.

What did Jesus do for him in that situation? Jesus did not care about the Pharisees' inveighing against him. Out of messianic compassion, Jesus was ready to risk his life as well as his future ministry in order to take care of this man with the shriveled hand. Look at verse 3. "Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, 'Stand up in front of everyone.'" His act was a declaration of war against the Pharisees. But it did not matter to him. Jesus was happy if only the man could be a normal person. Jesus was happy if only the man would be a hardworking person with his hands and support his family, and be a blessing to others. Jesus also wanted to help the religious leaders. So Jesus asked them, in verse 4, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" In this question, Jesus was eagerly hoping that they would discern between good and evil. But they remained silent (4). The law is good, but if there is no spirit of the law, it turns out to be a weapon for the strong to oppress the weak. The Pharisees made use of the law and burdened their suffering people. Now they were using a man with a shriveled hand as bait in trapping Jesus.

Jesus looked around at them in anger and was deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts (5). Jesus was sorry when the leaders of the nation were so corrupt spiritually, and so heartless that they could use a fatalistic man as bait. If one of the Pharisees had a son who fell into a well, he would immediately pull him out, regardless of the Sabbath day

(Lk 14:5). Yet the Pharisees were too selfish to take care of others. But Jesus was different. Jesus cared for the man with a shriveled hand. He said, "Stretch out your hand" (5). How did the man respond? By faith, the man stretched it out, and it was completely restored. In this way, Jesus demonstrated that he is the Messiah to the man with a shriveled hand as well as to the whole world. When the Pharisees saw Jesus' healing power, they immediately went to the Herodians--the collaborators with Rome--in order to make a plot to kill Jesus (6).

Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the lake (7). But the crowds who heard that Jesus had healed a man with a shriveled hand came to him from all over Galilee. And many came from Jerusalem in Judea, from Idumea, and from Tyre and Sidon (8-9). They wanted Jesus' hand of healing. They were crowds of people who were sick and demon-possessed (10-11). They frantically tried to get near him and touch him. Jesus was almost pushed into the lake. So he asked for a boat to be kept ready for him to get off shore for an emergency (9). This scene describes the situation of people without a shepherd. This scene shows a wonderful profile of Jesus' shepherd life.

III. Jesus appoints the twelve apostles (3:13-30)

First, Jesus chose twelve disciples (13,16-19). What did Jesus do when he saw the hopeless situation of the times? Jesus went up into the hills to pray (13; Lk 6:12). After spending the whole night in prayer, suddenly Jesus appointed twelve disciples. Jesus did not despair because of the dark world situation. Rather Jesus prayed how to fulfill God's will for world salvation. Then God gave him wisdom to raise disciples for the future work of God. Look at 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." Simon is number one on the list. "Simon" means "sand." He was a very emotional and abrupt person. Jesus gave him the name "Peter," meaning "rock," in the hope of raising him as the foundation of the church of God. The brothers James and John appeared to be quiet. But they were inwardly very ambitious. Jesus gave them the name Boanerges, which means Sons of Thunder, so they might become thunderous and courageous men of faith instead of men of selfish ambition. Andrew looked vague. He gave others the impression that nothing was possible and that nothing was impossible. Philip was a kind of genius mathematician. When he calculated this and that, nothing was possible. Bartholomew was a man whose presence did not make any difference. But he was always there at the dinner table. Matthew was a selfish tax collector. Thomas was a man of doubt. Thaddaeus was a daydreamer. Simon the Zealot was a terrorist member. And there was Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus. From a businessman's point of view, Jesus' choosing such people would not seem to work. When we carefully observe them, we see that each of them had his own unique character. They were all different kinds. As the saying goes, "Only a widow knows a widow's situation." Indeed, Jesus included all types of people among his disciples so that they could be shepherds for all kinds of people.

Second, Jesus called them to be with him (14). Look at verse 14b. "...that they might be with him...." What is the meaning of "be with him"? It

means common life together. To be together with someone may be the hardest thing for anyone, even for Jesus. But Jesus was always with his disciples so as to let them see him and be influenced. By being with them, Jesus helped them until these clumps of clay were changed into spiritual men, and until they came to know God personally, and until holy desire arose in their hearts to become the disciples of Jesus Christ and shepherds of God's flock.

Jesus called them "disciples." The word "disciple" means a learner or a student. The word "disciple" has root in the word "discipline." Without discipline, no one can be a disciple of Jesus. These days, the word "discipline" is becoming taboo. Because of this, education is not discipline-oriented for the edification of mankind, but to master skills only. But Jesus' training disciples was discipline-oriented. This discipline was well explained in Matthew 11:28-30. It says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." In this rebellious generation it's hard for anybody to learn from others. Especially, it is hard for anyone to learn Jesus' gentleness and humbleness. The Pharisees had the appearance of piety, but no spiritual strength. They were political and proud. Therefore we must learn from Jesus his gentleness and his humbleness.

The disciples were very ordinary people. But their great virtue was their great learning mind. Because of their learning mind they could learn of Jesus, become like Jesus, and become the greatest men in history. If we want to be his disciples, we must have a great learning mind like Jesus' disciples.

Third, Jesus trained them to preach the word and heal the sick (14b-15). Look at verses 14b,15. "...and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons." Jesus trained them until they had enough spiritual power to teach the word and to heal the sick. Healing the sick was a warming-up exercise for teaching God's word. The purpose of his discipleship training was to raise each person to heal the sick and preach the gospel. When Jesus chose twelve men, he had the same faith as that of God, who chose one man Abraham as a blessing for all people (Ge 12:1-3). Jesus also had faith in them that they would be changed into fathers of faith. Without having the same faith as that which Jesus had in his disciples, we cannot be fruitful disciple makers.

When Jesus entered a house, again a crowd gathered so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat (20). Jesus and his disciples suffered more than one can say to shepherd the flock of God. How did people respond? First, his family's persecution (21). When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind." Second, the religious leaders' persecution (22). The Pharisees said, "He is possessed by Beelzebub," which is the prince of demons. The teachers of the law said, "Jesus is driving out demons with the power of the prince of demons." Their criticism contradicts itself, for the prince of demons will not drive out his cub demons (23-26). Jesus was very sorry that the Pharisees and the teachers of the law were committing sins that will never be forgiven by blaspheming against the Holy Spirit (28-29).

In that dark time, Jesus did not despair at the dark world situation. Jesus chose twelve disciples and raised them as future leaders of the world. In this passage, we learn that we should not despair in any situation, but raise disciples of Jesus with all our heart and strength.

