

The Twelve

Matthew 10:1-15

In order to reflect our true identity as a church, perhaps we should change the name of our church to the Covenant Pentecostal Church of Mount Airy. We are a pentecostal church, after all. We believe in the power of the Holy Spirit which was first poured out upon the church at Pentecost, which was the enabling power upon the people of God to exercise gifts for the benefit of the church. Thus we could identify ourselves as a charismatic church as well, since the word charisma is the Greek word translated gifts. So maybe our name should be Covenant Pentecostal Charismatic Church of Surry County. And you could certainly add Apostolic to that name, the Covenant Apostolic Pentecostal Charismatic Church. And you though we had a long name now!

All of those words do provide an accurate description of who we are, though I fear, perhaps, that long name wouldn't communicate our identity very well in the context of our own community. But I don't want to give up those names, either. Especially apostolic. Most certainly, we are also apostolic. Remember Paul's own definition of the church in,

Eph. 2:19 "Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit."

Thus our confession of faith, using the Nicene Creed, "We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church." Maybe we should add catholic and holiness to our name as well! They are

all good descriptions and biblical definitions of the church, and catholic with a small "C" simply means that we exist throughout the whole world. I say all of that to emphasize our focus this afternoon, on apostolic. We are, indeed, an apostolic church.

When I was a teenager in the 1970s, I lived in town that was majority Roman Catholic, with a majority of the protestants belong to liberal, mainline churches: Methodist, Presbyterian, Episcopal and Baptist, probably in that order. When I became a Christian, I realized the need to join a church where the Bible was believed and preached clearly, where those who were members of the church were living for God seven days a week, not just attending church. So I went to a relatively new church, in a relatively new denomination. It was a very conservative branch from a Methodist church background. In college, I searched for a similar church, and my basic mindset was that any church that was old, any church that had an old heritage, must be either liberal or catholic. I wanted no part of either. By God's grace, I ended up in a church that was then called Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod. It was a very conservative branch of the Presbyterian heritage. And I assumed it was a very new church.

I was quite astounded to realize that this church claimed a very old heritage. Not just in terms of American history, but they made a really big deal about the church's heritage in the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century, hence the word reformed. So all of a sudden, my church history scanned back over 400 years. It was actually quite a surprising realization for me, that the church had existed and been so faithful for so long. Again, I had come to think, by my own observation, that the only faithful churches were very new ones. So 400 years was very old!

And then I began to study that reformation heritage, and

realized something that was a very obvious emphasis of that reformation. The protestant reformers were not coming up with something new and different, but rather returning the church to her apostolic roots and foundation. So in short order, as a young adult about 20 years old, I went from thinking that the true, faithful bible-believing evangelical church of our country was only about as old as I was to understanding that it was, in fact, nearly 2000 years old. So the reformed church, coming out of the protestant reformation, is really nothing more than the uncovering of the apostolic church. And when the Orthodox Presbyterian Church was begun in 1936, that is precisely the perspective that governed our whole church as well.

So what is a true, biblical church? Certainly, the starting point to answer that question must be a declaration of,

I. THE APOSTOLIC FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH.

So we read in our text today,
v.2-4

They were, at first, the twelve disciples. A disciple is a learner, a student, a follower. An apostle is something much more, for that word comes from the Greek word to send. To send with authority, with delegated power. An apostle is an ambassador, and perhaps the international ambassadors sent out by our federal government are the best illustration of apostleship. Ambassadors represent the whole of our country to a foreign country. When an ambassador speaks, it is as if the United States as a whole is speaking. At least, he represents the executive branch of our government, our President. That's the means of the word 'ambassador.'

Apostle adds the fullness of power and authority. Thus Paul's words that I just read from Ephesians 2. He adds the prophets to

this foundation, for they are, essentially, one and the same. "The household of God [is] built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets." Not just Jesus, though obviously he is the cornerstone for the whole foundation. But the whole foundation is emphasized.

So the Word of God is not limited to red letters, if your Bible has them, the words of Jesus printed in red. The church is not a red letter church, built solely upon Jesus. Rather, Jesus built the church upon the foundation of his apostles, and their importance can not be overemphasized.

Paul would write about the church to the Corinthians,

1 Cor. 12:27 "Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. 28 And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.'

First, in priority, apostles. First, in importance, in authority, in power, apostles. That's why our text this afternoon is so important. These first apostles are named: Peter, Andrew, James and John, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas and Matthew, James, Thaddaeus, Simon, and Judas. My first point, then, is to emphasize,

A. The fullness of the twelve.

It's not a coincidence that there are twelve, and that number is so obviously emphasized in this text, mentioned in verse 1, verse 2, and again in verse 5. Notice in verse 5 that they take on something of a formal identification, these twelve; or even more clearly, "the twelve." That identify is used repeatedly in the gospels, as they are not called "the apostles" so much as they are simply called "the twelve" over and over again. "The twelve."

After his ascension into heaven, again we read of the

prominence of these apostles,

Acts 6:1 “Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. 2 Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. 3 Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; 4 but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”

“The twelve” were the clear leaders and rulers, the apostles. And there in Acts 6, we see the beginning of that group who would later be called Deacons. And much later, in the prophecy of John regarding the future, eternal glory of the church in the age to come, we read this:

Rev. 21:10 “And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, 11 having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. 12 Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: 13 three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west. 14 Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.”

So the obvious connection of the fullness of twelve is a connecting link between the church of the Old Covenant, called Israel, and the church of the New Covenant. Just as there were twelve apostles who defined the existence of the church, so there were twelve tribes of Israel. The number is a number of fullness

and completeness. Twelve squared, 12 times 12, or 144 is also a number symbolizing that fullness. And since the number 1000 represents everything in a single category, you recall the use of the 144,000, the fullness of heaven itself.

All based on this number 12, the fullness of Old Covenant Israel and the fullness of the New Covenant church. So “the twelve” would come to represent the whole church; and very personally, the foundation of that church. Notice here, their power. The apostles possessed,

B. The power of Jesus’ authority.

v.1

We’ve seen this power before, with the emphasis upon the physical power to perform miracles as a testimony and proven evidence of the spiritual power to forgive sins. And we will see that in chapter after chapter that follows. Jesus’ instructions to his apostles are explicit,

v.8

Such power is the power of the kingdom which is come, as Jesus declares in,

Mat. 12:28 “But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you.”

And we read of the seventy-two whom Jesus sent out marvel when they returned,

Luke 10:17 “Then the seventy returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.” 18 And He said to them, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. 19 Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you.”

That is the power of Jesus' authority, power to cause the fall of Satan. That is the apostolic power present in the church, upon which the church is built. "Even the demons are subject to us in your name."

And so with that power we have the preaching of,

II. THE APOSTOLIC GOSPEL.

Let me read the words to you,
v.5-10

The priority is Israel, the gospel is for the Jew first. Because it is the fulfillment of everything that is Jewish. Jesus is the Jewish Messiah. He is the king of the Jews, the hope and consolation of Israel. Everything in the Old Covenant, every prophecy, every act of providence is nothing but the God of heaven preparing the way for Jesus. So when Jesus comes, he doesn't break with Judaism, but comes to fulfill it. The apostolic gospel is,

A. A message of life for Israel.

He calls them "the lost sheep of the house of Israel." And he is the good shepherd! He is the good shepherd of whom Isaiah spoke so clearly,

Is. 53:2 "For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. 3 He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. 4 Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. 5 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. 6 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."

There is the painful confession of our sinfulness, we have gone astray. Every one of us has turned to his his own way. That's what lost sheep do. And Jesus went to those lost sheep to give them life, to raise them from the dead.

And the message was about the kingdom. Jews, of course, expected an earthly kingdom, a restoration of David's kingdom. They expected a military ruler and a powerful army in order to take over the world. Jesus' kingdom, as he put it, was not of this world, but it was a kingdom nonetheless. And the message of the apostles as they laid the foundation of the church was,

B. A declaration of the inauguration of Jesus' kingdom. v.7

The kingdom has come. That's why there was such a display of supernatural power, so many miracles. The kingdom is at hand, and those miracles were signs of that arriving kingdom. They were signs of a great transition, signs that become the foundation upon which the church was built.

In general terms, that why we understand that those miraculous signs and displays of supernatural power were temporary gifts, apostolic gifts. Once the foundation of the church was laid, once the apostolic work was completed and the apostles themselves were dead, then the church would begin to built up upon that unique foundation, with elders and teachers to be sure, but no more apostles or workers of miracles. The miracles were markers of the dawning of this new age, "the kingdom is at hand." The kingdom is come! And Jesus is king!

That is still the message that we must declare and proclaim to

this world in which we live. It is also the message which gives us encouragement which stimulates the fullness and sincerity of our worship.

Heb. 12:28 “Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. 29 For our God is a consuming fire.”

The kingdom has come! And Jesus is king! In the language of the book of Revelation,

Rev. 11:15 “Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!” 16 And the twenty-four elders who sat before God on their thrones fell on their faces and worshiped God, 17 saying: “We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty, The One who is and who was and who is to come, Because You have taken Your great power and reigned.”

With the proclamation of that kingdom, however, comes,

III. APOSTOLIC JUDGMENT.

A division, some condemned, some redeemed. Some promised with the wrath of God, some blessed with his peace. So we read,
v.11-13a

A. The peace of God rests upon those who believe.

And the gospel is all about peace. But how do you achieve that peace? Only by faith. Only by trusting in Jesus.

Rom. 5:1 “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

It is all about Jesus.

Eph. 2:13 “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility 15 by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, 16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. 17 And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.”

Notice how this idea of the kingdom of Jesus and the peace of God are joined together in,

Col. 1:15 “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. 17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. 19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.”

These are Jesus’ own words,

John 14:27 “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”

John 16:33 “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

So peace. That's part of the apostolic judgment, a good judgment. A judgment of blessing, a judgment of peace. But it is not for everyone. The apostolic foundation of the church and the apostolic gospel that was preached includes this warning of judgment.

B. The wrath of God rests upon those who will not believe.

v.13b

He goes on,
v.14

A couple thoughts in that regard. I believe this is an apostolic example, therefore not necessarily an example that is normative or prescriptive for us. But I do believe that the principle would still abide, that those who will not listen, those who refuse to listen, those who stubbornly rebel against the word as it is preached, eventually deprive themselves of the right to hear that gospel. So you might have occasion to apply these words even today, "And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet."

It's a sober judgement, is it not? Much in line with the sobering words of,

1 John 5:16 "If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that. 17 All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not leading to death."

And there is sin that does lead to death. That's the warning.

Hebrews 10:26 "For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for

sins, 27 but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. 28 Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. 29 Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? 30 For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. And again, "The LORD will judge His people." 31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

Indeed,
v.15

And you know what happened to those two towns. Burned to the ground, under the judgment of God. That must be part of the apostolic gospel proclaimed as the foundation of the church. It is part of the gospel which I preach to you today, built upon that foundation.

So, even if we don't change our name to Covenant Apostolic Pentecostal Church, I will preach the gospel defined by all those names. I will proclaim the kingdom of Jesus and call you to serve him as King within the church which is built upon the foundation of the apostles. And I will preach to you what the apostles proclaimed at Pentecost,

Acts 2:38 "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise [of the gospel] is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call."