



HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

Healthy and Strong

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Mark 3:13-21

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¹³ And he went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him. ¹⁴ And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach ¹⁵ and have authority to cast out demons. ¹⁶ He appointed the twelve: 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, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Zealot, ¹⁹ and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

²⁰ Then he went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. ²¹ And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, "He is out of his mind."

(Pastor prays)

In the late 12th Century, Richard the Lion Heart was surreptitiously killed in battle at Aquitaine and his evil brother named John Lackland became the King of England. You might not know his name but you do know of the Magna Carta. Under John's ill-advised leadership, the throne would weaken and England as a kingdom would diminish and almost crumble. Lands were lost, churches were closed down, and the king— John— was excommunicated from the church. Everything that Henry II, that's John's father, everything that Henry II had built disintegrated because the kingdom was tunneled through with a labyrinth of greed, excess and sexual immorality and an indifference to the things of God.

As I read that history, I thought to myself: that's so similar to where we are in our country. Although we live in a democracy— and thank God we live in a democracy— if you can keep it. Thank God we live in a democracy in the United States. But as Christians we are not just citizens of the United States, we are citizens of a kingdom. And our King is not weak like John Lackland. Our King Jesus is strong. Our King lives to make us strong and to make us healthy. And in this passage this morning, Mark pulls us aside and we are introduced to some of the elements that go into this Kingdom. Mark pauses to give us an update and an editorial on how King Jesus starts to build His church, and it starts right here in Chapter 3. Here's the beginning of the church. Here's the pattern for our health and our strength as we live in a world that does not love our Kingdom and does not welcome our King.

I struggled this week. Honestly, I struggled this week to open this up so that we might find the nutrients in this passage. And I think the best way to do it is just to systematically walk through it. I'm going to try to use six phrases today. After I've said this, I wish I had used sentences. But there are six phrases to show that the Lord's church will be healthy and strong. That's the theme today.

The Lord's Church will be Healthy and Strong.

What's the first phrase for health and strength? The first one is #1

Periodic Separation

Or if you like sentences, **we need periodic separations.** Mark introduces us to the formation of Jesus and the 12 Apostles. He is not the first among equals. He is positioned as a Messiah, calling the Apostles to Himself. The men here will be called apostles, which is a separate office other than disciples, but Mark only uses that word two times. And although they are apostles, which we are not, they are also close followers of Jesus, which we want to be. And the text opened in verse 13 and says ¹³*And he went up on the mountain.* In those days, when he went up to the mountain, he went up to pray. He went up the mountain to pray. And all night, Jesus continued to pray to God. Like a

new and better Moses, He goes up to the mountain. This pictures Him pulling away from the crowd, pulling away from people, pulling away from the business. You know, on a study I try to do cross-reference. If you have a Bible with the apparatus at the bottom, it probably tells you where this is. You flip over and you find it in Luke. Luke tells the same story. Luke goes a little further and tells us in Luke 6:12, ¹² *In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God.* He's going to make a big decision, calling the disciples, and before He did that, He spent the entire night praying. Now when I read that cross-reference, honestly, I just got convicted. Because here in this passage is the perfect, sinless son of God, spending all night in prayer. He is spending all night in prayer before He makes this big decision and calls the 12 apostles. And if Jesus prayed like that before He did something, how much more do I need to pray? This is a periodic separation, being alone with God and putting my concerns and my decisions and my problems and my issues before Him. Look, God won't build His church or bless your life if you are not drawing away with Him, if you are not finding some time in an extended time of fellowship with God.

I tried this analogy earlier. If our lives are the fire, then the Bible is the wood that stokes the fire. The spirit of God is the flame and prayer ignites the blaze. I want to be strong and healthy as a Christian. I want to be in a church that's filled with people who are seeking to be healthy and strong in Christ. For that to happen, I need to spend time and be alone with God. We've done it before, but I wonder if you would commit to give your mornings to God. Adrian Rogers, a great preacher of another day, Adrian Rogers said that the prayer offered to God in the morning is the key that unlocks the rest of your day. The Lord's church will be healthy and strong. We need periodic separation. Let me give you another phrase. A second phrase. Here's the second one. Let's take the whole verse 13. We need...

Divine Initiative

Or if you like sentences, **we rely on divine initiative.** Let's read all of verse 13 and notice the way Mark writes it. ¹³ *And he went up on the mountain and*

called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him. The way Mark writes it, it seems to be a larger group of people following Jesus, and from that larger group, Jesus will call out the ones He wants, the 12. There's something else here though. This verse is filled with the sovereign power of Jesus. Jesus called who He wanted and they came to Him. There is power in the call of God. There is the Holy Spirit and the power of God moving. Not only that, right here in verse 13, you have the authority of Jesus on display. This text tells us that He chooses and He appoints and He calls His disciples. What is interesting to me is that Jesus says the same thing consistently. This is the very same thing Jesus says at the end of His earthly ministry. So here's the beginning of His earthly ministry. And then you see it in John 15:16, ¹⁶ *You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.* On the night He was betrayed, He said this to His disciples, you did not choose me. I chose you and appointed you that you will bear fruit. It's a beautiful picture of the sovereign Jesus. That He really is in control.

I don't know why I got on the Adrian Rogers kick. But Adrian Rogers said God is sovereign so you can live with confidence. In other words, you've got nothing to be afraid of. Don't be afraid. I mean, even Jesus, when Jesus is going to the cross, remember what He says when He's going to the cross in John 10:18. ¹⁸ *No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father."*

The fact that there's this divine initiative gives us great hope when we share the Gospel with other people. Because saving them is not up to us. That's God's work. We share the Gospel. What is that, the Gospel? The Gospel is that God is holy and we are sinners separated from God. Because of our sin, we are under condemnation. Jesus said, in John 3:18, ¹⁸ *Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.* Condemnation means that we are under the wrath of God and when we die,

we will go to Hell. That's a terrible problem that all people are under condemnation. But the Gospel says that the love of God is that He gave us Christ. Jesus Christ lived perfectly and goes to the cross to take the wrath of God away from sinners and gives us His righteousness. After He died on the cross, the sign that it's accepted, that it worked, is that God raised Him from the dead. He ascended into Heaven, and the Gospel offer is, if you will believe that, you will be saved.

If you're not careful, sometimes when you're talking about the Gospel, it can feel like you're doing a sales pitch. It's just good to remember that it is not up to us. Our obligation is to share Christ. God will do the saving through the Gospel. I want to be a strong, healthy Christian in a strong, healthy church. If that's going to happen, we need to make sure we're pulling away to spend time with God. In the mornings, spend time with God. It means that we rely on God who is divine, not us. We are not going to save people, it's God doing that. There's something else in this passage. You'll find it in verse 14. Another phrase, a third phrase. And that is...

Solid Discipleship

Let me show it to you in verse 14. Let's turn our attention to the call of the 12 Apostles. Now there are no "capital A" Apostles anymore. That was only from the baptism of Jesus to the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. Those were the Apostles. There are no Apostles here. But there are disciples. We can learn a significant lesson about what it means to be a Christian, a follower of Christ, a disciple from verse 14-15. So let's read them together and I will go into the authority given to the Apostles found in verse 15. But we'll come back to verse 14. I want to split it apart and show discipleship, and then we'll go to the commissions in verse 14. ¹⁴ *And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach* ¹⁵ *and have authority to cast out demons.* Here's discipleship, so that they might be with him. And then he might send them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons.

Let's go back to verse 14 and drill down on the first part. See that little phrase "so that they might be with him." To be with Jesus, to get a genuine spiritual education. These 12 men would spend every single day of their lives for 3 years with Jesus. They would hear everything He said. They would learn from Him. They would live with Him, they would follow Him, they would imitate Him, they would be corrected by Him. They would grow because of Him, becoming more like Christ. Now, since we don't have the physical-bodied Jesus here with us, how do we grow? Jesus ascended into heaven and in Acts 2 the Holy Spirit descended and the church was born. So that, if you have given your life to Jesus Christ, you have been filled with the Holy Spirit.

How then do we grow as disciples? God has given us tangible ways. The first way to grow as a disciple is going to be coming through corporate worship. It's to actually be here in corporate worship, singing the songs of God and being encouraged. Today, we are encouraged by the children on the stage who give us hope for the future. We sang to the Lord about Christ being ours. We open the Bible and see what the text says. Worship is not dependent on any one person. Worship is dependent on the word and spirit that God speaks to our hearts. You can't grow as a Christian if you don't actually come to church.

What else do you need? You need daily Bible intake...worship and daily Bible intake. We have the greatest privilege in history. I mentioned the 12th Century. There were no Bibles given to people at church in the 12th Century. You and I right now have multiple copies of God's word. You've probably got Bibles at your house, stuck in drawers, on shelves. You might have them in the floorboard of your car. We've got so many Bibles we don't know what to do with them. We have different versions of English Bibles. What a privilege it is to actually have the word of God, in a language that you understand.

Not only Bible intake, but focused prayer and confession. Focused prayer is a good thing to do. You can take The Lord's Prayer and line it out and just let that be your outline on what you say in your prayers. You will be lifting your concerns to God your Father, who is in Heaven. We pray His will would be

done right here on Earth. We pray that our daily bread would be given and that we would be protected from sin. And then, when we do sin, we confess. But a confession of sin is not just I'm a sinner, A confession of sin is, yes, I am a sinner, separated from God, but for Christ, who lived in my place and died in my place. I claim the righteousness of Jesus. When we confess our sin, we also confess that we are forgiven in grace.

If you're going to grow as a Christian, we need to make sure that you're part of a small group of people who know your name, and can look into your life and can take care of you when things go south in your life. You can have men and women investing in you. You can have two or three who are helping and praying for you. And you're reading books together and growing in grace.

And the last element of discipleship is the fact that you're seeking to obey. We have our children's musical here tonight. What did you call it? The unbearable parable. We have our children and you can come and you'll see them and there will be grandparents and parents here, making videos. But you know what? If you look past that, what you have there is children that 10 to 12 years from now are going to be living in a world where the moral flow is going against everything they believe in. You're going to need to know how to obey.

How do I obey what God has called me to obey? In part, what we do is instill strength into our backbones for all the things that I've mentioned so that we can actually live lives of obedience. Look, God has given us His church. He's given us the Holy Spirit. He's given us His word. He's given us people. He's given us the hope of the Gospel and with those things, the Lord's church will be healthy and strong. Let me give you something else you'll find in verse 14. Let's take the second-half. The first half is the discipleship and second half is ministry. That'll be my 4th phrase.

Gospel Ministry

Go back with me and let's read verse 14, especially the last half. ¹⁴ *And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with*

Him and he might send them out to preach. Do you see that? He appointed them, called them what to? He commissions them. He sent them out to herald, to declare, to say, to actually speak, to give an account for the hope that is within you. Look, the focus of Christian ministry is a narrow focus, a narrow focus that has broad applications. So what is the narrow? The narrow focus is the saving of the Gospel. Because God is love. He is real and people don't have to go to Hell. That's the saving power of Jesus. That's what our narrow focus of ministry is, the Gospel.

Why do we do the food pantry? Just to be nice and help people get food, just because? They're social programs for that. Is that what this is? No! We do that because Jesus is the bread of life that will feed your soul for eternity. So we feed people hoping to point back to what Christ does for us. Why do we have the Clothes Closet? It's a ministry. Why do we do that? Do we do that just because we think is something nice here. No! We do that because we believe that if you are not clothed in the righteousness of Christ, you'll be cast out. So we clothe people to point to Christ. And we have the Hearts & Hammers, who build ramps for people. They do so because unless the Lord builds a house, those who labor do so in vain.

We are sent out. It's one thing to gather together and to be with Jesus. But we are sent. What did John Piper say? John Piper said that missions exist because worship doesn't. We desire for people to know Jesus. We want people to know the God that created them through Jesus Christ, His son who will save them. Why do we press for all races and ethnicities? Why do we talk about that? Is that just because we're trying to be up with the times? No! It's because at the cross, Jesus reconciled us to God and to one another. He gave us the ministry of reconciliation. Why do we gather on Sundays? We gather on Sundays to worship and to be healed, to be strengthened, and to be lifted up, to be reminded that there's hope. So we can be sent out and preach Christ with our lives and with our mouths. Is that how you see your life? Is the Gospel ministry in whatever career or job or way of income you have, that God is giving you and you make money, that money has been given to you to fund missions. You're the missionary. That's been given to you so that you

might be on mission. They used to do it in the old churches. Maybe we'll get us some signs to put out when you're leaving that say - you are now entering the mission field. I want the Lord's church to be healthy and strong. That was four phrases. Let me give you a fifth, #5

Diverse Family

Or in a sentence, **we are a diverse family**. He appointed the 12 and that takes us on purpose to the 12 tribes of Israel. That is an extension of God's people. Jesus now would come in as an extension of Israel, the New Israel. It is an extension of God's people in Christ. In verse 16-19, you have a list of 12 Apostles. If you read the Bible, you find four such lists. Luke 6, Acts 1, and Matthew 10 are the lists that are similar, but there are some variances. In this list you find a tax collector, radicals, 4 fishermen, a betrayer, and five guys who we don't really know much about. All the lists are arranged differently except one thing. What you have is every list has Judas Iscariot, the betrayer, as the last one mentioned. And every list has Peter as the first one.

Let's go there to verse 16. Let's start with Peter. What do we know about Peter? The text tells us he is Simon, son of John. He's the brother of Andrew. Jesus gave him the name Peter. His actual name is Simon. The name is "Petros" in Greek and "Cephas" in Aramaic. It means "the rock." I don't know if he had a head like a rock or if Jesus was looking forward to a time that he would build. We don't know why he got that name early. We know he was impetuous. We know he was a leader in the Church of Jerusalem. We know that he had feet of clay and a mouth that got away from him from time to time. We know that his heart was for Christ, and after the resurrection we know that Peter was unflappable. He wrote first and second Peter in the New Testament. He probably gave all the information to Mark to write the Gospel of Mark. That's Peter.

Let's round out the inner circle. There are James and John in verse 17. James and John and their nickname means "sons of thunder." Why did Jesus give them that nickname? We don't know. In Mark Chapter 9, they came upon

some people casting out demons in the name of Jesus, so James and John run over there and try to stop them by force, picking a fight. Or maybe in Luke Chapter 9 they go into a Samaritan village and the Samaritans are not having it. And so James and John are like “let’s burn the place to the ground, let’s call down fire.” So maybe that’s why He called them that. Maybe He called them that because of the way they reacted. The funny thing about James and John, James will be the very first Apostle to be martyred for the faith. He’ll die first. John, his brother, will live the longest. John will be on the island of Patmos where he will write five books in the New Testament: the Gospel of John, Revelation, and I, II, and III John. That rounds out the inner circle.

Then there’s Andrew. In verse 18 is Andrew. Andrew is best known for bringing Peter to Jesus. Andrew was a follower of John the Baptist before he became a follower of Jesus. Then there’s Philip in verse 18. Philip is the one who heard the Gentiles say “Sir, we would see Jesus.” And what does Philip do? Philip takes these people to Andrew. Andrew takes them to Jesus. Then there’s Bartholomew. Bartholomew is not really even a name. Bartholomew is a title, “son of Tolome.” Bartholomew is not a name. He is probably the disciple named Nathaniel. That’s what you find in John’s gospel. Nathaniel, remember him? Nathaniel’s the one that said, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Jesus said about Nathaniel, “here’s an Israelite in whom there is no guile.” In other words, Nathaniel is the kind of guy that what you see is what you get. We know Matthew is Levi, the tax collector. We already met him.

Then there’s Thomas, anxious Thomas, anxious, worried, doubting Thomas. Anxious Thomas is always expecting evil. It’s hard for Thomas to be optimistic. He’s a sort of a glass half-full guy. He’s a pessimist. You know, every pessimist thinks they’re a realist. He’s a pain. He thinks why? He’s the one who doubts so bad when he hears that Jesus had been there, but he wasn’t there. When Jesus shows up, don’t forget he’s the one that put his hands there and his phrase “my Lord and my God.” What about James, son of Alphaeus? He could be known as James the young or James the less. That’s

about all we know of him. Thaddeus. He's probably listed in John 14 as Judas, who is not Iscariot. And then there's Simon the zealot. Simon is out there. He's a radical right-wing guy. He's into politics. He wants to overthrow the Roman government. He's joined their band. And then the last one, verse 19, Judas Iscariot, the betrayer. I never understand it. I don't get that. Like if Jesus, He knows, and yet He pulled the betrayer in.

You step back from this and you think about these men. They're laymen. There's not a preacher. There's not a prophet. There's not a scholar. There's not an expert in the bunch. And any way you cut it, when you look at the individual men, what we know of them, it was a strange and imperfect and diverse group of men that the Lord called to be His disciples, to build His church. All of them so different. All of them devoted to Christ. Diverse family. There is one last phrase if you will just stay with me. This one last phrase is...

Gracious determination

Verse 20-21. It's hard to know what to do with this passage. It's so weird and embarrassing that Mark is the only one to record the incident. The other gospel writers don't tell us about this. And when we read it, you'll see why.

²⁰ Then he went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. ²¹ And when his family heard it, they went out to seize Him, for they

were saying, "He is out of his mind." John tells us in John 7:5, *⁵ For not even his brothers believed in Him.* They thought He was crazy and tried an intervention. I was talking to Connie last night about this passage. I was like, "Babe, what do you think the application of this passage is?" Connie said the application is sometimes your family thinks you're crazy but that doesn't mean that you are. That could be a really good application. But I think if you step back from this, and you think about history, about what happens in three years, the history of Jesus life, His death and resurrection, His ascension.

When the Gospels close out and you open up to Acts 1, who do you find in the early church? You find Mary, the mother of Jesus. You find His brothers there in Jerusalem. They've put their faith in the resurrected Jesus. Paul tells us in Galatians 1:19, he mentions James and he calls him the Lord's brother. There

are two books in our New Testament written by the half-brothers of Jesus, James and Jude. I think the point can be, don't write people off. When they reject you, especially family, conversion sometimes takes time. It takes time with some people. And they might even think that you're insane. Be graciously determined to keep sharing Jesus and loving people to Christ. Look, the Lord's church, that's what we are, the Lord's Church will be healthy and strong. We want to be a church that is built on the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In a moment, we're going to sing, and when we do. I want you to sing with your heart to the Lord. But before we do that, I want us to close my time of preaching and our time of worship with a word of prayer and commitment. I want you to think with me which of these spoke most to you. Maybe your life has gotten so rushed that you have not intentionally set aside a separated time with God, and you need that. Maybe this morning you want to commit. Maybe you've carried the weight of the world and you felt like it's all dependent on you and you just need to be reminded today of the divine initiative, that Jesus does the saving. You've got somebody really close to you that's not a Christian and you felt the weight of that. It's good for you to feel that, but don't let it overwhelm you. Trust that God will do that. Maybe it's solid discipleship. You've been a member of this church and for the first time in a long time, you feel like you need to be growing in Christ.

Maybe you feel like you need to be doing something to share the Gospel. God has brought you here but maybe you feel like you don't belong or you don't fit in with everybody. Look, don't go somewhere where you think you fit in. God's family is a diverse family. It calls people from all walks of life to be together to build this church. Maybe you've got somebody who you've just sort of given up on and you have been reminded this morning that you need to have gracious determination, even if they think you're crazy. You keep sharing Jesus and loving them to Christ. The Lord's Church will be healthy and strong.

(Pastor prays)