

“The Master’s Men” (part 2)

Mark 3:13-19

Take your Bible and turn once again to the third chapter of Mark, and we’re in verses 13-19. We looked at this text in our time together last week, and it is one of four places in the New Testament where we find the names of the twelve apostles. Jesus called twelve average and ordinary men to follow Him in close discipleship, twelve men that He would send out in His authority, twelve men who would eventually turn the world upside down. We have the tendency to think of the apostles in ‘glowing’ terms. We tend to put them on a pedestal somewhere just below Jesus Himself because we assume that these are the highest and the brightest and the most saintly men of all time. But they were sinners just like us, and men who needed the grace of God just like us. They were not divine, not the most educated, not the most highly skilled, not the most gifted humanly speaking. They are an ordinary group of men who receive an extraordinary calling.

Satan attempts to convince us that our failures render us useless God and His church. But Jesus’ choice of these twelve men testifies to the fact that He delights in using the unworthy and unqualified. Jesus turned the world upside down with these men, not because they had extraordinary talent, unusual ability, or powerful influence. No, He used them to turn the world upside down because God worked in them to do it. (Read)

The choosing of the twelve disciples by Jesus was a turning point. Because of the crowds that were following Him, it was important for Jesus to select a smaller group to travel closely with Him. The Twelve became His constant companions and closest disciples. He chose just a handful to pour His own life into, and He would then would appoint them to be His apostles. When it came to selecting them, He didn’t search the temple in Jerusalem for the best and brightest

scholars. Instead, He chose ordinary fishermen Like Peter and Andrew, James and John. He invited a tax collector named Levi, who came to be known as Matthew. He chose working-class, uneducated men with obvious flaws. Why? It is important for us to remember that Jesus saw His men not as what they were, but as what they were to become.

I came across an illustration that puts the selection of these twelve men into perspective. What if they were selected in the way we do things in the 21st century, the way we select people for strategic positions in the corporate world? It is a fictional email from the “Jordan Management Consultants” sent to Jesus in response to His request for an assessment of the men He chose to be His apostles. It reads:

“Dear Sir,

Thank You for submitting the résumés of the twelve men You have picked for management positions in Your new organization. All of them have now taken our battery of tests. We have not only run the results through our computer, but also arranged personal interviews with each one of them with our psychologist and vocational aptitude consultant.

It is the staff’s opinion that most of Your candidates are lacking in background, education, and vocational aptitude for the type of enterprise You are undertaking.

Simon Peter is emotionally unstable and given to fits of temper. Andrew has no qualities of leadership. The two sons of Zebedee, James and John, place their personal interests above company loyalty. Thomas demonstrates a questioning attitude that would tend to undermine morale. We feel it our duty to tell You that Matthew has been blacklisted by the Greater Jerusalem Better Business Bureau. James, the son of Alphaeus, and particularly Simon the Zealot, have radical

leanings, and they both registered a high score on the manic-depressive scale. Thaddaeus is definitely sensitive, but he wants to make everyone happy.

One of the candidates, however, shows great potential. He is a man of ability and resourcefulness, meets people well, has a keen business mind, and has contacts in high places. He is highly motivated, ambitious, and responsible. We recommend Judas Iscariot as Your controller and right-hand man. All of the other profiles are self-explanatory. We wish You every success in Your new venture.”

Three years in which the Son of God ministered, and within that time frame He would hand things over to these men to continue His work, and then He would be gone physically. And His mission would be carried on by these very human individuals, people like you and me, despite all their faults and failures. Most of them would have been disqualified for service if they had been chosen based on what they were when Jesus called them. But what is important is who they became because they got close to Jesus, and the power of the Holy Spirit at work in them to empower them to carry out the Great Commission. As the old expression goes, God doesn't call the qualified, but qualifies the called!

We read about them throughout the gospels, but from time to time, they will emerge in a significant way. Usually, they are behind the scenes. But here in our text, they are front and center where we find them mentioned by name. And of course, you and I know them as the twelve disciples or 'learners' who were closely discipled by Jesus, men who would later change the world. And they would become His twelve 'apostles' which means 'sent out' ones, those who are His official representatives, but not before they've been 'covered in His dust.' In other words, they walked so closely beside their master-teacher that they were literally covered with the dust kicked up by his sandals.

And so here in our text, they are out of the shadows and in the spotlight of Mark's attention. Jesus has been engaged in His ministry that was taking place around Capernaum in the region surrounding the Sea of Galilee. He had been teaching in the synagogue, and they heard Him teach. He had been announcing the good news about the kingdom, and they listened carefully. He's been ministering to all the crowds, and we see that in verses 6-12. And now He will officially call these twelve to a place of closer discipleship and apostleship before He will eventually send them out on their own to minister and to preach with His authority. And though the authority and specific mission of the Twelve was unique in the sense that they were apostles, you and I can still gain some important insights as it relates to our own understanding of discipleship today.

I've already mentioned two things about the Master's men:

1—They were CALLED (3:13)

“And He went up on the mountain and called to Him those whom He desired, and they came to Him.”

In the midst of a busy time of ministry when the crowds had been pressing in all around Jesus, He calls these twelve men who will be His representatives. Verse 13 says, “And He went up on the mountain and called to Him those whom He desired, and they came to Him.” Luke's account says:

Luke 6:12-13—“In these days He went out to the mountain to pray, and all night He continued in prayer to God. And when day came, He called His disciples and chose from them twelve, whom He named apostles.”

Jesus spent all night in communion with the Father, then He called to Himself the men He wanted. He had told them to pray to the Lord of the harvest to ‘send out’

laborers, and now that's what He is doing. He spends all night in prayer and communion with the Father before He calls and officially commissions the twelve. And they are going to be the answer to His prayer. He 'calls' them and they respond to His call. In the same way, God calls men and women today by His Spirit. You may hearing His call even now. But you must respond to that call! Not only are they called, but we also see how:

2—They were APPOINTED (3:14-16a)

“And He appointed twelve (whom He also named apostles) so that they might be with Him and He might send them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons. He appointed the twelve...”

They are appointed by Him to serve in a unique capacity. And notice in verses 14-15 their three-fold appointment:

- That they might be with Him (closeness to Jesus)
- And He might send them out (commission from Jesus)
- And have authority (controlled by Jesus)

They were appointed to be with Him, to study under Him, to watch Him up close, and learn from Him. And the purpose was so that they would be sent out by Him to preach and have authority to cast out demons. They were to sent out with the Lord's power and authority to do what He had been doing. The message was primary while the miracles were secondary. The apostles are the foundation of the church that would come. Ephesians 2:20 says the church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone. Which is to say the church that you and I are part of now is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets according to the Scriptures.

Robert Coleman — *“His concern was not with programs to reach the multitudes, but with men whom the multitudes would follow. These men were to be His method of winning the world to God. The initial objective of Jesus’ plan was to enlist men who could bear witness to His life and carry on His work after He returned to the Father.”*

Now, who were they? Well, they were twelve in number which is not without its significance. There were twelve tribes of Israel, twelve thrones for judgement on the twelve tribes of Israel, Revelation tells us that there are twelve pearly gates in the New Jerusalem, twelve foundations to that same city, and there will be twelve manner of fruits to eat from in the new heaven and the new earth. And so the number twelve is very significant. Jesus is appointing them as new leaders of Israel in judgment of what Judaism had become. He is striking at the very heart of a false religious system of works headed up by the scribes and Pharisees.

They are called, and they are appointed. Then notice a third thing:

3— They were ORDINARY (3:16b-17)

“Simon (to whom He gave the name Peter); James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom He gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder)...”

Now, there are four lists of the apostles that we are given in Scripture, and this list in Mark is one of those. You will find this same list of the twelve disciples in four places—**Matthew 10:1-4**, **Mark 3:13-19**, **Luke 6:12-16**, and **Acts 1:13** (**see graphic on the screen**). When you’re reading them, they all seem to be the same. But when you look at them in greater detail, you’ll notice that they differ a bit. Both Mark and Matthew have the name ‘Thaddeus’ in the list, while Luke and Acts have the name ‘Judas son of James.’ Of course, it is the same person, and

scholars think that Judas may have been his original name and he later changed it to 'Thaddeus' which means 'warmhearted.' And it may have been to avoid the stigma that had been attached to the name 'Judas' because of Judas Iscariot.

Something else is that all four lists in Scripture begin with Simon Peter. And they all end with Judas Iscariot except, that is, Acts, because Judas by that time had killed himself. Also, you see that these four lists appear in three groups of four names. Peter, Andrew, James and John are always in the first group. Philip, Bartholomew (Nathaniel in John's gospel), Thomas, and Matthew are always in the second group. James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot are always in the third group. I think that is interesting. In all four lists mentioned in the Bible, Peter's name always heads the first group. Philip always heads up the second group, and James always heads up the third group. You may think that is a helpful way to remember all their names.

Peter is always mentioned first in the lists of the apostles that we find in the New Testament. He seems to have been a natural born leader—impulsive, outspoken, and quick to make a decision. Keep in mind that Mark writes his gospel from Peter's perspective. Together with James and John, they formed a trio, sort of an inner circle among the twelve disciples. The three of them were chosen on several occasions to see glimpses of Christ that were not shown to the others, such the experience on the Mount of Transfiguration.

Notice who is not in the group. There's no Hercules, or no Superman. There's no one with connections. No religious leaders from Jerusalem, no men of degree. No one from the aristocracy or the wealthy upper class. Instead, what we find mentioned are some blue-collar workers. There's Peter, James, and John. Then there's Andrew, Philip, and Bartholomew. Then Matthew, Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus. And then there's Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot,

and Judas Iscariot. Judas is always mentioned last in the list of the apostles. Just some ordinary men with ordinary names from ordinary backgrounds. And they are completely unremarkable in every way.

Robert Coleman—*“None of them occupied prominent places in the Synagogue, nor did any of them belong to the Levitical priesthood. For the most part they were common laboring men, probably having no professional training beyond the rudiments of knowledge necessary for their vocation...None of them could have been considered wealthy. They had no academic degrees in the arts and philosophies of their day. By any standard of sophisticated culture then and now they would surely be considered as a rather ragged [bunch] of souls.”*

One might wonder how in the world Jesus could ever even use them! They were impulsive, inconsistent, immature—not the kind of group one would expect to win the world for Christ. Yet Jesus saw in them the potential of leadership for this kingdom enterprise of which we are a part today.

Andy Davis—*“Jesus’ choice of them was most certainly based on His knowledge of them, His knowledge of their hearts and in what they would become. Out of all the crowd that was following Him, He knew all of them, all of them individually and perfectly.”*

Consider what He said to Nathanael:

John 1:47-49—**“Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him and said of him, ‘Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!’ Nathanael said to Him, ‘How do You know me?’ Jesus answered him, ‘Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.’ Nathanael answered Him, ‘Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!’”** (Ps. 139?)

How foolish we are to think that we can hide from Him! Friends, He is the One who has eyes of blazing fire and feet of burnished bronze. He sees us and knows us, and Nathanael is blown away. The only thing left to do is bow before Him and respond to His call. Have you?

They are common men with an uncommon calling. In other words, the task they were called to is what made them so important. It wasn't anything about these men themselves, but what the Lord Jesus would do through in and through their witness. And not only will they become the founders of the church and play a key leadership role in the early church. But think of how they would go on to become the instrumentation through which most of the New Testament would be given. They received truth from God by means of divine revelation in the books of the New Testament. And it is this very thing which Paul mentions:

Ephesians 3:5—“The mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.”

And of course the 'mystery' to which he refers is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the same promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. That's what the apostles preached. Everything we are talking about this morning has been revealed by God through their witness and instruction. Acts 2:42 says that the church 'continued steadfastly' in the apostles' doctrine. So that the New Testament is their written record, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and authoritative for us in terms of what we believe and practice.

Now, I think this is important for us to remember. God isn't looking for superstars. He takes ordinary people and uses them for His purposes. Paul told the Corinthians:

1 Corinthians 1:26-29—“For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.”

That way, God gets the glory. And so it is now. God saves those who confess their need for His grace, those who are weak He makes strong, and those who are despised by the world He uses to confound the world.

4—They were IMPERFECT (3:18-19)

“Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Him.”

These men were called, appointed, and ordinary. And yet I also think that it is important for us to point out the fact that these men were far from perfect. Peter? He was impulsive and prone to put his foot in his mouth. James and John? They were hot-tempered and quick on the draw. Matthew? He had been a tax collector. They were immature at times, arguing about who among them was the greatest. Another thing that we typically don't think about is their youthful age at the time. Perhaps as young as their late teens and early twenties.

Robby Gallaty (“Rediscovering Discipleship”) has argued for why this was the case:

- Description

Jesus chose two terms to describe His disciples. A term 'mikrōnos' which means little ones (Matt. 10:42), and 'teknion' which means little children (John 13:33).

- Training

The Jewish Mishnah outlined the system for training where Scripture study begins at age 5, Mishnah at 10, obligations to the Torah at 13, continual rabbinical study at 15 if one was chosen to be tutored by a formal teacher. Marriage typically happened by 18, and formal teaching at 30.

- Itinerant travel

It was custom for most disciples of Jewish rabbis to begin traveling with their rabbi at the age of 15 or 16. We know that Jesus' disciples had left their jobs and families behind, and were therefore young men.

- Marital Status

We know that Peter was married because his mother-in-law is mentioned back in Mark 1:30. And yet there is no evidence that the others were married yet.

- Temple Tax

According to Exodus 30, the temple tax was required at Passover from every Jewish male aged 20 and older. We have record of only two of the men paying it —Jesus and Peter. Jesus tells Peter in Matthew 17:27 to go the sea and cast a hook and take the first fish that comes up, and when he opens its mouth he will find a shekel. Jesus says, "Take that and give it to them for Me and for yourself." So it very well could be that the other disciples were not yet 20.

- Longevity

Early Christian tradition concerning the apostles support the idea that they were young men. Due to the length of their ministries after Jesus' death and resurrection and the late dates of both Peter and John's epistles, it can assume the disciples were young adults when Jesus appoints them.

- Immaturity

The disciples exemplified behavior characteristic of young men. Whether it was arguing over who is the greatest, or unawareness that a devil was living among them for three years, their inability to grasp theological truths, or perhaps their fearfulness on two occasions of storms on the sea, it all points to the likelihood that they are young men. And by the way, most mothers don't speak up for their adult sons about seating assignments at supper, but that's what the mother of James and John did in Matt. 20:20! And so it all helps make sense of why Jesus had to teach them again and again. (Can I get an 'amen' from anyone with teenage sons?) We may find it difficult to understand. But the term 'teenager' didn't come about in our society until the 1940s.

Robby Gallaty — *“A ‘teenager’ of the first century world would be nothing like a teenager living today. We still consider young teens to be children in our culture. At the same time, it is worth challenging our cultural norms here. Perhaps we should consider entrusting younger men and women with ministerial duties. Some of the ripest believers for discipleship may be younger adults who are in this stage of life: moldable, shapeable, flexible, and available with a future discipleship ministry of many years still ahead of them.”*

Our young men and women are capable of showing great leadership, doing great things. We should never dismiss them on the basis of age! Remember what Paul had to say to another young man:

1 Timothy 4:12—“Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.”

Throughout church history, many of the most significant revival movements have begun with young people. Again and again, God has used students, teenagers, and young adults who were spiritually hungry, willing to step out, and bold enough to obey Him when the older generations had grown complacent. While revivals always involve people no matter the age, young people have often served as the catalyst or the spark.

I know I’ve talked a lot about George Whitefield. But he was only 24 when began his preaching campaign across the American colonies. Colleges like Yale University and Princeton University became centers of spiritual awakening as young men and women gathered for prayer, repentance, and missionary zeal. In 1806, a small group of college students from Williams College in Massachusetts met for prayer during a thunderstorm under a haystack. It was out of that experience known as the ‘Haystack Prayer Meeting’ that their burden for world missions helped to launch the modern missionary movement in America. Six years later they would send Adoniram Judson to Burma. Young men and women with very little influence at the time ended up shaping global Christianity.

And then there’s Evan Roberts who was only in his mid-twenties and became burdened for spiritual awakening and devoted himself to prayer, often asking God to ‘bend’ the people of Wales in repentance and obedience. The revival began in 1904 and quickly spread through churches and coal-mining communities as thousands gathered to worship and confess sin, and prayer. Services often lasted late into the night. In time, an estimated 100,000 people professed faith in Christ, and the movement influenced revival efforts around the world. The

movement spread rapidly because young people carried the gospel into schools, workplaces, and communities.

What might God be doing in our own time?

And so we shouldn't glamorize the twelve disciples. More than being a list of twelve saints, they're more like the dirty dozen when Jesus calls them Himself! They are young men with human faults and failings that characterize all our lives. Someone may say, "Then why did Jesus choose them?" They were chosen by Him not because of what they were, but because of what they would become by His grace. And that is how it always is! Ephesians 3:5 refers to them as 'holy' apostles. They would set a standard for godliness and true spiritual growth. Yes, they were young and imperfect men in the rough when Jesus called them. But they didn't remain that way. They grew in grace and in terms of their character, so that they would be examples for the early church. And they would go on to become the channels through which God gave us the New Testament. Also, think of this—they would all go on to be martyred for the sake of their faith in Christ. Blood-sealed testimony!

But, let's stop to think about this for a minute. All that these men would one day become was nowhere in their minds on the morning when Jesus came to recruit them. They're not even diamonds in the rough yet. They're still just chunks of coal. All their shortcomings and human failings seemed to overshadow their potential. Yes, they had abandoned their nets, forsaken their fields, and left their tax tables behind to follow Jesus. But at this point they had absolutely no idea where He would take them, and how He would train them in that for which they had no natural aptitude. How could such a group of ordinary people turn the world upside down? The answer lies in the fact that:

5—They were EMPOWERED (Acts 1:8)

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

What kind of men were the disciples? They were men who were called and appointed though ordinary and imperfect. And what made all the difference in their lives is the power with which they would be clothed. They were empowered men, not men who went out to face the world in their own feeble strength. This power would not fully become theirs until after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Think about where things stood the moment Jesus was crucified. These men were nowhere to be found. Judas defected and betrayed Jesus. Peter had denied knowing Him. The others had all fled. Only John is at the foot of the cross, to whom Jesus entrusts the care of His mother. And simply looking on, you would think that the last three and half years had all been for naught. It had all ended in failure. Even after the resurrection, it is the women who followed Jesus that went first to the tomb and bring back word to these timid disciples of all they had seen. But folks, there is something that happens by the time we make it to the book of Acts! Jesus has ascended, His Spirit descends, indwelling these timid and ordinary men. The result is that they are infused with divine power that enables them to do what Jesus had commissioned them to do. Their witness is then supernaturally empowered.

Pay attention to how the people of Jerusalem perceived the apostles:

Acts 4:13—“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 language Luke uses there is strong and suggests how the disciples were unlikely witnesses.

“Uneducated and Untrained” — *literally ἀγράμματοί καὶ ἰδιῶται or ‘ungrammar-ed idiots’*

No formal training. No credentials. Just a couple of guys who spent the last three and a half years with the Son of God, who now were indwelt by the presence of God, and baptized in the power of God! The crowd marvels at their testimony, though they were uneducated and untrained. But here is the secret of their power—‘and they realized that they had been with Jesus.’

And they realized that they had been with Jesus! What a statement. I wonder what other people realize when they take a look at our lives? Is it obvious to others that we’ve been with Jesus lately? If education was what it takes to win the world, the world would have been won many times over by now. There’s no shortage of men of degree. If finances or branding or ingenuity was what it takes to win the world, again there would be no problem. There’s a ton of money, clever marketing strategies, and no shortage of consultants these days. And yet the world remains lost and without Christ. What turned the first century world upside down? The better question is ‘who’ turned it upside down. The answer is men who had been with Jesus!

Why have I spent so much time looking at this list of names in Mark 3? Because I believe we’ve done a disservice to ourselves when all we do is glamorize the disciples and make them ‘unlike’ us. Don’t get me wrong, I believe we respect them for their faithfulness to God and the unique office they held in church history. But at the end of the day, they were no different from you or me. They were ordinary, hard-working men who responded to the invitation from the

Master. And it was an invitation that would lead to their changing the world. Think about it—Jesus bypassed the theological institutions of Jerusalem, the intellectual and religious sects of the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and He called twelve very average men to follow Him. That’s who the ‘Master’s Men’ were—ordinary. And aren’t you so glad that Jesus still extends the same invitation to average people like us today? Judas is there at the bottom of the list as a reminder of how close in proximity a person can to Jesus and still be lost. And Peter is there at the head of the list as a reminder to us of how royal a mess you can make of your commitment to Jesus and still become a ‘rock’ in His purposes. And so we look at this group of unremarkable men, those the world would be quick to dismiss, those whom we wonder how God could do anything with. But we must not forget that they are the very ones He came to save and use for His purposes.

And so the key verse of our text this morning might very well be verse 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 and have authority.” Being with Jesus and being empowered by Jesus is what made the difference in their lives. It will in ours as well.

Kent Hughes — *“Wavering, inconsistent Simon became Peter, the rock. John and James became Boanerges, the ‘Sons of Thunder—dynamic apostles! Anonymous, average Andrew became the patron saint of three nations. Thomas the skeptic became a tenacious man of faith. Simon, the radical, subversive zealot, became a man truly zealous for God. Loathsome Levi became the writer of the Gospel of the Son of Man.”*

Such is the change that Jesus produces in the life of the person who trusts in Him. Though we’re beset with failure and weakness, and though we are far from

the perfect men and women that we long to be, we trust that God's grace is sufficient for us. And as the apostle John himself writes in:

1 John 3:2—“Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when He appears we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is.”

And such hope is incentive in our lives to run our race with endurance, to press toward the goal of maturity in Christ.

“Father, we praise You for Your grace. In grace, You have chosen us, redeemed us, and commissioned us to be Your disciples. It is not about us, Lord. But it is all for Your sake and for Your glory. Though we are ordinary people, You’ve given us an extraordinary calling. Empower us to live it out as Your disciples. In the name of Jesus, Amen.”