The Servant’s Call
Mark 3:13-19

Introduction

In the third chapter of Mark we experience a sweeping portrait of the Servant of God and His
courage (vv.1-6); His compassion (vv.7-12); and now our attention is drawn to the Servant’s call
(vv.13-19); the appointment and training of a group of men who will follow Jesus, continue His
work after His death and testify concerning the things Jesus said and did. These men will
constitute an inner core of witnesses for Christ’s resurrection, they will proclaim and offer a solid
basis for our faith in Jesus, they will in effect become ambassadors for Christ, representatives
with a message, telling the story of salvation.

We are given a brief picture of their number (vv.13-14); their nature (v.15) and their names (vv.
16-19). Twelve men are called; they are to preach and cast out demons; their names have come to
us as Peter, James, John, Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James (the son of
Alphaeus), Thaddaeus, Simon, and Judas Iscariot.

The Servant Calls Certain Men (v.13)

Mark 3:13 (NKJV) And He went up on the mountain and called to Him those He Himself wanted.
And they came to Him.

In Luke’s gospel were are told that Jesus spent the preceding night in prayer with His Father.
We are immediately struck by the fact that their commission and selection does not come
from themselves, the people, or even the Church. Jesus calls these men. The verb called
stresses that Jesus acted in His own sovereign interests (MacArthur Study Note). The passage
also seems to indicate that the men came voluntarily to Him! Richard Parker famously said,
“God doesn’t call people who are qualified, He calls people who are willing, and then He
qualifies them.”

Luke 6:12 (NKJV) Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray,
and continued all night in prayer to God.

The Servant Designates And Commissions Men (v.14-15)

Mark 3:14 (NKJV) Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might
send them out to preach,

We are not told why Jesus chose 12 and not 11 or 13. Some have suggested the number is
significant. Twelve is the number of government. There were twelve tribes of Israel (12
foundations; 12 gates in heaven; the New Jerusalem is 12 x12 =144). Later Jesus will send 70.

The word translated “appointed” is the Greek verb poieo which means “do” or “make”. The
KJV translates this “ordain” but the NIV and NASB translate this “appointed” as well. The word
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was used to describe the appointment of a high ranking official or the appointing of an office or position. It probably meant a position with credentials. The picture is of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the King of the Universe appointing them as His ministers and His representatives. Elizabeth Dole wrote; “It is not what I do that matters, but what a sovereign God chooses to do through me. God does not want worldly successes. He wants me. He wants my heart in submission to Him. Life is not just a few years to spend on self-indulgence and career advancement. It is a privilege, a responsibility, a stewardship to be lived according to a much higher calling, God’s calling. This alone gives true meaning to life”.

The appointment is made that “. . .they might be with Him”.

In what sense? Companionship? There is a sense that the apostles were a glorious company; but for the most part these men were insignificant and ordinary. There significance and impact comes because of their relationship to and calling from Jesus. I think it was so that they could observe Jesus, watch Jesus, observe His demeanor; His character, His words and His deeds; drinking in His words, understanding His instructions, laying hold of His message.

The call to preach is preceded by a time of preparation. That preparation included walking with Jesus and watching Jesus.

The appointment is made that “that they might. . .preach”. These men will become ambassadors for Christ; representatives with a message. In ancient days people were sent to herald or proclaim a message on behalf of kings, governors, rulers. Here preach (kerusso) means to herald, proclaim, publish or evangelize. The message was to be sent to every person (see Mark 16:15-16). Paul writes of his apostolic ministry as a ministry of reconciliation.  

2 Corinthians 5:18-19 (NKJV) Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation,19that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

1 Peter 4:11 (NLT) Do you have the gift of speaking? Then speak as though God himself were speaking through you. Do you have the gift of helping others? Do it with all the strength and energy that God supplies. Then everything you do will bring glory to God through Jesus Christ. All glory and power to him forever and ever! Amen.


Mark 3:15 (NKJV) and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons:
Jesus makes the choice. The men are chosen. And we are impressed first with the gap between their natural abilities and the work they are called to do! The appointment is made that they might receive or “have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons.” Some have suggested that demons are not real. That demons cannot invade or inhabit their hosts. **The Bible affirms the reality and malevolence of demonic spirits.**

The Bible seems to put into two distinct categories the healing of sicknesses and the casting out of demons. The emphasis is on those appointed by Jesus to exercise “power”. The word is not *dunamis*; intrinsic power or supernatural power; but rather the word is *exousia* or authority or the delegation of power.

The servant of God is not given supernatural powers apart from God’s Holy Spirit. The servant of God is not given power to use as the servant wills, but rather as God wills. The disciples were given authority to carry out healing s and the casting out of demons; the servant prays and speaks the word but God does the actual healings and God’s power accomplishes the expulsion of demonic beings.

**1 John 3:8 (NKJV)** *He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.*

The apostolic calling included privilege and power. Intimate interaction with Jesus. Preaching and teaching, and obeying Christ’s commands. The subject of their preaching was to proclaim the advent of God’s kingdom on the earth. To know Jesus and make Jesus known. The apostolic calling included sympathy for the afflicted; prayer and supplication for the souls of men, but also sensitivity to physical problems and spiritual conditions.

You might think, “I wish I had the supernatural power to be used by God as an instrument of working miracles.” But we have something better, someone better. We have God’s Word and God’s unfailing promises. We have the living, life-giving Word of God. We have the promise of the Spirit; and by the Word and by the Spirit we see miracles take place every day. We can pray and preach; plant and water; and God will give the increase. We are blessed so we can be a blessing. We are saved so we can be used by God to an instrument in the blessing and salvation of others. **We are called that we might be sent. God speaks to us that we might speak to others.**

**The Servant Changes And Transforms Men (vv.16-19)**

**Mark 3:16 (NKJV)** *Simon, to whom He gave the name Peter;*
There are four lists of the apostles given in the New Testament (here; Acts 1:13). In Matthew’s list (10:1-4) and Luke’s list (6:13-16) I present an in depth character analysis of each apostle (see Sermon listings for those passages). In keeping with Mark’s brevity and drama I will only provide a brief portrait. If you want an in depth study on the individual apostles I would refer you to my notes and teachings found in Matthew 10:1-4).

The name Peter (Greek: petros). Cephas (Aramaic: kepha). Peter was a fisherman.

We know a great deal about Peter. The New Testament writers paints a picture of great passion and great failure. If I were to ask you to make a list from the Bible of Peter’s strengths and weaknesses you might be able to produce a pretty significant list.

We might put on the strength side; self-sacrificing--he was willing to give it all up to follow Jesus (see Mark 1:16-18; Matt. 8:14). Peter has a predisposition towards spiritual things, a child like faith, kind hearted, trusting, courageous. But he also had some pretty impressive failures. Peter was prideful and sometimes presumptuous. Why else would he tell Jesus, “Heaven forbid that you should go to Jerusalem be arrested and killed.” Not going to happen on my watch.

How can you say Jesus is the Son of God in one breath and have Jesus tell you in a matter of a few minutes, “Get behind me Satan”? Peter’s courage could easily be transformed into foolish behavior by trying to prevent the arrest of Jesus and the wounding of the High Priest’s servant.

Peter--slow to learn, self-seeking, disbelieving, overbearing, and then weak and cowardly denying Jesus three times!

Let’s put him at the top of the list!

But Peter was changed--dramatically permanently, substantially at the resurrection of Jesus! Did Peter go on and never fail ever again? No. He struggled with legalism and hypocrisy and had to be called on the carpet by Paul the Apostle.

Mark 3:17 (NKJV) James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James, to whom He gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder;

James and John--brothers--sons of Zebedee. Prosperous fisherman and if any could be placed in the company of the successful it would be these two boys. Prosperous fisherman on the Galilee is not the same as a fishing empire in Rome or Greece. There seems to be some evidence that John had at least a casual friendship with the High Priest and his household, perhaps providing fish for his household and perhaps other important people. The mother of James and John was Salome; who is thought by some Bible scholars to be a close relative (perhaps sister) of Mary the mother of Jesus. If that’s the case these boys would have been cousins or close relatives to Jesus.

Peter has Mark write Boanerges (Aramaic) or Sons of Thunder. Do you think that’s their stage name?
Jesus calls them *Sons of Thunder* (Luke 9:54). Do you remember when they wanted to call fire from heaven and roast a village? Why call them “Sons of Thunder”? Because someone had already taken the domain name of Stormy Temper! John MacArthur suggests this name characterized their intense and outspoken personalities!

We see elements of pride and ambition as they have their mom approach Jesus and ask whether or not they can sit at his right hand and left hand throughout eternity! The boys wanted the highest offices in Christ’s coming kingdom! But Jesus would change their stormy temper into burning zeal and ambition for the Kingdom of God! Jesus changes these men! They will become two of the greatest human witnesses for the glory of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ. James will be the first of the twelve to suffer death for the sake of Jesus and his brother will pen the gospel of John and the epistles of John. One brother will be the first to go to heaven; and the other the last living apostle.

*Mark 3:18 (NKJV)* *Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Canaanite;*

In the chronology of discipleship Andrew is called first. He then found his brother Peter. Andrew was willing to be second in order for Jesus to be first. It would appear that Andrew early on joined John the Baptist’s ministry team; and when Andrew heard John the Baptist call Jesus “The lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” immediately switched rabbi’s and became a first century Jesus Freak. Andrew provided no sermons or books that we will later read. According to church tradition Andrew will preach in Jerusalem and suffer death on an X shaped cross.

When we are introduced to Philip; he is not looking for Jesus--but Jesus was looking for him (John 1:43). We are given little information--was Philip slow, unresponsive, did he almost miss his chance at discipleship and apostleship? He did miss an opportunity when Jesus told his disciples to feed the multitudes and Philip--basically said, that’s not really possible! Clearly he was slow in discovering the true identity, mission and destiny of Jesus. But he finally figured it out! *Bartholomew is also called Nathanael.* Our brief introduction of him in John’s gospel finds him under a fig tree sometime before Jesus “saw” him and called him.

Matthew--is also called Levi. He was a tax collector, seen as a traitor and Roman sympathizer. Matthew grew up in a world of alienation and isolation from the religious leaders and mainstream Judaism. But Jesus loved him and called him from his tax booth into an adventure that rocked the world. He wrote the gospel of Matthew.

*Thomas was also called Didymus (meaning twin).* He is presented in the New Testament as man of great courage and loyalty even though most people first think of him as the doubter! Did Thomas struggle with skepticism and doubt?
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Well yes! Thomas had access to an empty tomb, the testimony of women, the testimony of the other apostles, and he still couldn’t bring himself to believe Jesus had risen from the dead, because--well--people don’t come back to life in the real world! Yet Jesus shows up--the risen Jesus shows up and Thomas is changed!

Who is James the son of Alphaeus? Scholars suggest his father was Alphaeus or Clopos (John 19:25). His mother was one of the women who stood with Jesus’ mother and other women at the cross of Calvary and visited the tomb of Jesus to anoint the body along with Mary Magdalene (John 19:25). He had a brother, Joses, who was also a follower of Jesus (Mark 15:40; 16:1; John 19:25).

Thaddaeus-Labbeus: This apostle is the same as Judas the son of James. His name means breast or one who praises or man of heart! Matthew and Mark both call him “Thaddaeus” (heart man) or the guy with the big heart!

Can you imagine having a big heart and then Jesus comes and makes the heart even bigger?

And Simon the Canaanite or Simon the Zealot! Simon was a card carrying member of a sect called Zealots! The core principles in this group included a fanatical hatred for the Romans, and belief that God alone was the true ruler and redeemer of Israel. They preached and led revolutions against any and all foreign occupiers. Now Simon would become a Zealot for Jesus. The Bible does not seem to indicate that his fanaticism ever left him. He simply substituted one form of fanaticism for another! Simon was called by his companions “The Zealot”.

But now his devotion is wholly to Jesus.

Mark 3:19 (NKJV) and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him. And they went into a house.

Last on the list Judas Iscariot. All the men on the list were changed by Jesus. Even Judas Iscariot. But the change was superficial. The change was external. Judas was probably good with money. Why else put him in charge of the purse? But he will betray Jesus. How is such a thing possible? And why in the world would Jesus pick someone, to experience such close companionship, spiritual and emotional investment?

Have I not chosen you twelve and one of you is a devil?

Why did Jesus choose these men? Dr. A.B. Bruce offers the suggestion that these men were the best Jesus could muster!

They were poor, insignificant fishermen, ex-tax collectors, there does not seem to be a single one who was a man of wealth, power, rank, culture. Judged by ordinary standards these men were “weak” “foolish” “base” and “despised”.

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Oddy enough the men Jesus called were not necessarily called on the basis of brilliance, or wealth, or talent, or charisma, or charm. Almost any scribe or Pharisee would have been a better scholar. The men were poor, ordinary. They were not called to be brilliant organizers or politicians or theologians. They were called to be witnesses. Witness Jesus, the facts of Jesus and His deeds, witness His resurrection. The requirements of a witness are a knowledge of the facts, a willingness to communicate those facts and a reputation for honesty. There is nothing in the text that tells us these men were romantic, imaginative, extraordinary.

Almost all of them left no writings or sermons. The remarkable truth is that had they been men of remarkable talent and genius that talent and genius might make some believe the story of Jesus or the life of Jesus was a product of their imaginations! These men turned the world upside down. The success of their labors was not due to their own gifting, but rather the power of God and the presence of Jesus. We look at these men and what they accomplished and we say “This is the power of God”. The insignificance of the messenger throws light on the significance of the message. Who is really at work? The base and weak things are used so that we may know that the power and the excellency is of God and not ourselves. “We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that you may know the power is of God and not ourselves”.

The list is meant to inspire us what God can do with ordinary people. With weak instruments, with the base and the despised. Jesus puts to shame the wise and the strong and brings them to nothing. Jesus takes people like Martin Luther, the son of a poor miner, and puts His strength in Him. Ask Billy Graham. He will tell you he the son of a poor farmer from South Carolina. What is it about him that Presidents and Kings and heads of state would call on him?

John Bunyon was a tinker. Do you know what a tinker was? A person who went from town to town and village to village, mending pots and pans. But God revealed His truth to him and the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. God gave John Bunyon a dream--and that dream became the Book Pilgrim’s Progress.

Conclusion

The night before Jesus died, with a full heart and sincere affection He told these men; “Ye are they which have continued with Me in My temptations” (Luke 22:28; R.V.).